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THE UNTOLD HALF

"ALIEN"

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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK AND LONDON.

THE UNTOLD HALF

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By "ALIEN"

AUTHOR OF "WHEAT IN THE EAR," ETC.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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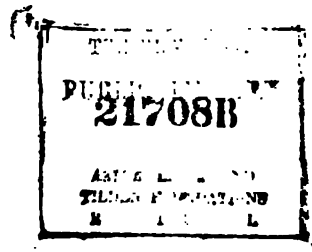
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NOTE

SEVERAL of my critics have observed that the speech of my characters of humble life differs from that to which one is accustomed in England. That is entirely true. The speech of the average New Zealander of to-day is quite without provincialism, is spontaneous, free, and often picturesque. I make this little explanation before introducing the reader to Max and Marvel, two of the principal characters in the following story.

"ALIEN."

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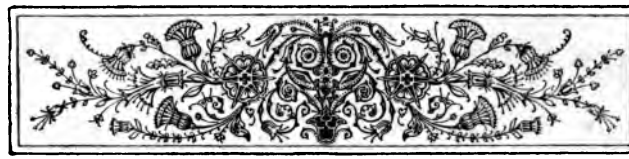

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THE UNTOLD HALF

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CHAPTER I

FAR FROM THE BUSY HAUNTS

IN a region of mountain, glacier, and river, forest-girt Lake Manapouri lay under the glamour of the southern sunset. The virgin snows that capped the mighty mountains flanking the lake touched the crimson sky, and the blood-red west poured its colour into the silver of cascades tumbling from indigo rocks to meet the purple and russet waters below. The grand Cathedral Peaks reared their hoary heads in the distance, now enwreathed in rainbow mists, which, veiling high passes under the evening star, drew in, revealed the mighty crags, descended slowly and cut off the forest-fringed arms of the lake, curled upwards again and obliterated mystery with mystery.

The ancient silence of the mountains was broken by reverberating echoes of avalanches falling far away;

nearer by the music of rapids singing of their everlasting source, the shrill note of the *weka*, the softer call of the *kiwis*, and the human, thrilling voice of a girl.

She stood upon the veranda of a log cottage built upon the margin of the lake—a toy-house embedded between mountain and water, its brightly curtained windows, gleaming among flowering vine, arresting the eye of the traveller in a wilderness of magnificence; where deep, dark ravine and sombre shadow contrasted with gleaming snow-pinnacle; and where little news came from distant cities, and the wars were cloud wars, and the rumours of war the thunder-cannon of the fastnesses held by the ages. An occasional echo of man's daring wafted from the snow-fields: one went up to cloudland and came down no more; another had died in the bosom of some deep lake embedded in precipitous rock; and one had scaled a dangerous pass that led to a wonderland of tumbling falls, forests, and fairy groves.

But the dark eyes of the girl had beheld these things, and the witchery of mountain and lake had not contented them; she shaded them with her hand from the grandeur of the savage peaks, and, turning from Fiordland, focussed her vision to the road-track visible among the shadows of rock and forest, watching intently for the coach that presently emerged into the open and the tinted light of sunset. It was the link between the wilderness and habitation occasionally

bringing a living presence to the wilds. This evening there was a man on the box-seat, and, as though he came with a message to her from a world she pined for, her eyes brightened and her cheeks flushed to meet him.

The Maori driver drew rein, singing contentedly in sonorous bass, "*'T was mother's little pickaninny.*" He had a parcel to deliver, and while he rummaged, Marvel Meredith's unabashed glance discovered that the stranger was well-looking and young, and that his suit of knickerbocker tweeds was of "tourist" cut; that he was fair, slightly sunburnt, and that his face was reposeful, strong, cynical, and that his grey eyes were soft though penetrating in expression, and had a trick of fastening themselves upon an object as though he saw it. He evidently saw her, and seemed to decide that she was worth attention. Unusually tall, she emphasised her height by the proud poise of her head; her rounded lissom figure suggested strength as well as gracefulness, and the way her little feet were planted and her body held, it was not difficult to imagine her stepping lightly from boulder to boulder over a mountain gorge, or, with shoulders thrown back to the storm, climbing her native peaks. Her dress did not disavow, but proclaimed a girl's natural vanity, for it revealed the soft round throat and arms to the dimpled elbow. It was but cotton, its tint was of faded rose shaded to a pale brown in the folds; the kerchief at

her neck was of fine muslin, and the belt clasping her waist was silver. Her abundant dark hair—bronze where it caught the light—was coiled with simple art, and clustered in tiny curls about the low forehead and bare throat. How her appearance would have carried in the modern world she did not know—here it was remarkable. She gauged that by the steady gaze of the man's eyes. She had crossed his vision when it was dazed by much loveliness, but she had arrested it.

While the flush of gratification was tingling her cheeks, the porch door opened, and a man stepped on the veranda beside her—a tall, gaunt man with "a February face," cold, set, stern, with deep eyes of singularly penetrating glance, and the far-seeing look of the sailor. Tall as the girl was, her head only reached his shoulder, and her fine physical proportions lost undue significance beside the sinewy length and strength of limb of the man. Although young, his face was set in the determined lines of a middle-aged man, the lines from nose to chin were deep-cut, and the dark brows met in a stern furrow; but the curve of jaw was softened by a singularly sweet mouth—a mouth not weak in any line. The lips folded resolutely and in determination, but a strange sweetness lingered about them, and a stranger almost expected them to open in a rush of soft words belying the sternness of the face.

Looking attentively at the man on the box-seat, then

critically at the girl, he bade the stranger a curt good-evening—who answered with the polite assurance and uplifted hat of easy manners—then busied himself with the package delivered, nodded to the driver, and would have thus dismissed the incident. But the girl gazed yearningly after the departing coach. The crack of the driver's whip awoke echoes which but slowly died away into the silence; his snatch of song trailed far into the distance before she turned—then she did so half savagely, as though some thought of her own, or his, had hustled her. She made to push past him, then stopped.

"Well?" she asked defiantly, the two brown eyes meeting the downward gaze of the man before her.

"You 've got the cries of the city in your ears again, the light of its lamps in your eyes," he said, with singular gentleness and sadness.

"Well?" she interrogated again in the same tone.

"And it deafens and blinds you to this," he added with a gesture, indicating the surrounding loveliness—"it deadens your heart, hardens it."

"And if it does am I to blame? Am I to blame that I long for stir and life, that I love people more than mountains?"

"People, not me," he said. Then rousing into sudden passion he continued: "A crowd, a stranger, a new kerchief, a knot of ribbon from the town, for these

you pine—any one of these will make you smile. You look at me with gloomy eyes."

She laughed.

"I have looked at you so long," she said lightly and with a touch of scorn. "Max Hawthorne, man of the mountains, strong and stern like them! Bitter, hard you are, Max, on a girl and her ways, hard like your mother was on my father. It was that drove him away."

She turned impatiently, and folding her soft arms on the rail of the veranda, looked again where the coach had disappeared among the shadows.

Max shifted his position and with his broad shoulders shut off her view.

"That 's not so," he said, trying to swallow the anger her words had roused, "nor is it true about my mother. Your father was—" His face blazed under the tan, then grew cold. He did not finish his sentence, but his voice was thick and husky when he proceeded. "I have not told you yet, nor shall I, how your father stabbed her!" Then with a gentle touch upon her arm he asked, his passion sunk in humility, "Am I stern? Am I frozen and cold? Listen." He lifted his hand with simple impressiveness.

Marvel raised her head. Silence far and near, deep and profound, unbroken save by tumbling streams.

"I hear nothing but falling water," she said sullenly.

"It was frozen snow before the sun melted it," he said. "Your love could melt me——"

She broke in upon his words with a laugh. "Poetical!"

"Is it?" he asked. "It 's truth," he added simply. He was a clumsy fellow and had no duplicity. He took the illustration as a symbol of what was reality to him, not by choice of cultivated intellect—it was adaptable.

"It does not signify whether written or said, it 's truth anyway," he commented presently.

"Always truth, truth, fact, fact!" exclaimed the girl, with irritation. "I 'm tired of truthful, dry, uninteresting facts—I 'd like a little nonsense without any rhyme or reason. There are pleasant things, I take it, not absolutely true—the colours of the mist, those golden pathways on the water, illusions, of course, but beautiful."

The man followed her glance with his own, then searched the girl's face. He felt the sophistry of her argument, but could not combat it, nor voice his inextinguishable need. But his suffering was sacred because of her; while she was near to bewitch him he could bear, although she cowed him when tempest and danger found his spirit undaunted. As explorer and guide, he knew the meaning of danger; the everlasting hills had been his home from infancy: their silence and solitude and stern purity had breathed

something of their spirit into the man whose companions they were—their iciest winds did not chill him as the cold glances of this girl, nor their storms batter him like her scorn. This evening a new feeling of loneliness took possession of him. A sense of alienation from happiness, an intangible shadow, darkened his mind. Would Marvel go? Would this thirst for excitement kill his hope? Her father's blood, the blood of betrayal, ran in her veins. The next minute his face was dyed with the shame of his thought.

"Marvel," called his mother's voice, breaking in upon his reverie in cold, decisive tones, "Marvel, come in."

The girl turned with a little gesture indicative of restrained impatience, and entered the cottage.

The door opened into a square lobby, with a doorway right and left, and another at the end. Marvel passed the threshold on the left, and stood in a long, low, roughly ceilinged apartment, with a window at each end. A bare, clean floor was carpeted only by red cloth rugs of woman's handicraft; ribbons to match tied back the white curtains, and the deep window-sills bloomed with pot plants. A chintz-covered cane sofa, several deep-seated chairs upholstered to match, a huge chest of drawers in mahogany, and a table of the same wood covered with a red cloth, completed the furniture of the room. The walls were roughly plastered by an unskilled hand, and unadorned, save by

several enlarged photographs which hung in shell frames. One was of a singularly handsome man, with eyes and curved mouth like Marvel's; but the face lacked her strength and decision, and the lips seemed smiling in thinly veiled scorn. The light from the western window flooded full upon it, and quickened the pictured face to a look of life; it seemed conscious of itself, appeared to flush under its veil of cynicism and self-satisfaction, and to smirk insolently at the pictured woman opposite, and to deride her stern hard-featured beauty.

Max and Marvel, as depicted in their childhood, held a conspicuous place; and in a shadowy corner the fifth portrait hung—of a rough, ungainly man.

The room was without dust or speck, the bright touches of colour alone redeemed it from downright ugliness; and yet there was a certain grim interest in it pertaining to its daily occupant—a woman who lay in a white-draped bed.

In reality the woman would have claimed first attention—the room was but a setting to her austerity. The bed stood between the eastern and western windows; on the one hand its occupant could see the sun rise, on the other watch its setting behind the snow-peaks. Its beams had shortened now, and left the face on the pillow in the grey afterlight—a face wonderfully like that of Max, but older and whiter, sterner. The pale lips were drawn into a hard line; the iron-grey hair was

rigidly parted and coiled from the seamed forehead into neat braids behind. It was a dead, cold face, inscrutable, implacable, except for the blue-grey eyes, which shone under bushy eyebrows that were like the eyebrows of a man.

"Yes," said Marvel, who, entering the room, seemed to infuse it with life, the life of beauty and youth. "You called me—mother."

She hesitated over the last word, as though reluctant to claim kindred. The woman noted, her hard face grew more rigid. She seemed about to speak, then glanced at the pictured face in its place of honour. She had married Marvel's father when her own son was a big lad and Marvel was a little witch-child; but her step-daughter still stumbled over the word "mother." Not that she had any fond remembrance of another woman bearing that name. The woman on the bed had cared for her as Frank Meredith had not done; but it was an antagonism of instinct, a warring against the limitations of this woman's sphere; the emotional at feud with the practical.

The father of Max had been an honest man, and Mary Hawthorne his hard-working wife. While they twain had been of one flesh, she kept his house, bore his child, nursed him in sickness, tended him in health, and mourned him in death, without a suspicion of sentiment or imagination, and for several years of widowhood she pursued her monotonous path without

deviation. On the verge of "the wilderness," midway between the lakes and the nearest town, she kept an inn, and was known on the road for a "hard-headed, conscientious body," who gave little charity but the fair value of a shilling. Here, one day, came Frank Meredith and his wayward Marvel, and the stern, silent woman, who had neither tears nor smiles, approval nor censure for the outside world, mothered the handsome pair, first as hostess, and then as the young man's wife.

As mine host of the inn, Frank Meredith shone, while a fever of youth burned in the woman's sluggish veins, lighting her eyes, tinting her cheeks, curving the set mouth, and, to a voice unmusical, giving soft tones. Mary Meredith fetched and carried for her laughing lord; brushed his soft curls for him, tied his kerchief, warmed his slippers, and laced his boots; which service the man permitted with a gracious condescension that suited his personal beauty—both beauty and toleration alike being cherished in a sort of agony of appreciation by the woman whose muscles had grown tense with labour. She was up last at night to tend belated travellers and bar the doors, and rose first in the morning to unbolt, polish, and scrub, and tend the witch-child that tyrannised over her gaunt, melancholy-visaged, overgrown son.

When one morning she found that her husband had deserted and robbed her she laid her hand upon her boy's arm with a quick movement, as though in re-

morse for having for the moment displaced him. Her eyes were full of tears, and in her blanched face an eagerness and piteousness. No word was spoken between the two, but the lad drew his breath and girded himself; not with a thought that he had been defrauded of love or estate, but with the resolve that one day he would avenge that look on his mother's face.

The woman went to work again without complaint, and those who would have condoled, being checked by her reserve, ridiculed when out of hearing, till by reason of her silence they forgot she ever was wounded; her pride thus saving her the pain of the weaker nature that parades its wound for the ointment that ofttimes keeps it raw. But her face grew thinner, her voice sharper, while she held her head high and her manners had an ugly side—the side she turned to the world. But while she grappled with difficulties she showed a practical reasonableness towards the girl and boy that disarmed them of fear. When Max and Marvel were man and woman she thought first of rest. She sold the wayside inn—some said she feared difficulties with the girl and the company it brought—and came to the lake from the highway, but not too far away to be found by the returning wanderer. Then, when she had fitted the nest to her liking, she stooped, one day, to lift a weight not heavier than she had carried frequently, and her back snapped and she was helpless.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN ON THE BOX-SEAT

"YOU called me," said Marvel again, receiving no answer except the scornful flash of the woman's eyes.

"You are cruel," was the answer in even, passionless tones that had something of despair in them. "Why don't you go?"

"Go!" echoed the girl, surprised. She had counted herself a prisoner, duty bound.

"Aye, go," responded the cold voice without a break. "You *will* go sooner or later, better let it be sooner. Better let it be before you bring my lad to sorrow. I heard you just now. Shut-to the window; I don't want Max to overhear *me*."

Marvel obeyed mechanically; she had learned the trick of obedience to this woman. When the window was closed, the girl stood sullenly looking out over the waters where long shadows were trailing. "I thought you needed me," she said, by way of answer.

"Need? And what if I do? It 's a poor sort of a creature that puts its own need first. I 'm chained in my body to this bed like a log, but I ain't chained in my mind, and I can see how indifferent you are to anything but your own pleasure. And it 's useless wishing you were otherwise. Every seed after its kind."

The bitterness of the tone arrested Marvel; also the words. The silent woman had found tongue. Marvel winced. It was the first implied reproach she had heard against her father. She flushed sensitively, but more with wounded vanity than love. The glamour which the deserted wife had thrown about Frank Meredith had affected her own vision. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of the man as he was. It had been the privilege of shelter and pampering to be her father's daughter in this woman's home.

"If it 's in the blood it will show one day or another," murmured Mary Meredith, as though to herself.

"No, don't say it!" exclaimed the girl, with a quick change of manner to tones and gestures of entreaty. "Don't say that I am craven. Am I selfish, that sometimes I feel like one hopelessly imprisoned? Perhaps I am; but you are not at fault, you have shared your life with me, only I do not think you feel the same about things. I detest monotony; I 'm not ungrateful in my heart, it 's my temper. Let me begin over again, but——"

She paused in her hot speech, pressed the palms of

her clasped hands together, and paled, her eyes shining with a frightened look as they met those regarding her.

"But what?" asked the woman.

"Max must not make love to me."

She waited after her bold speech, as though fearing reproach. But none came; instead, her foster-mother sighed.

"You see," said Marvel, going on eagerly, glad to avail herself of the unusual privilege of free speech, "Max and I have been as brother and sister—chums. As my chum there was no one like Max. But since he has wanted to be something different I am afraid of him. He misunderstands, misconstrues everything. My old careless ways hurt him; if I am gentle he hopes falsely. It is so difficult, and it makes me so wretched to see him miserable that I get angry. I want to stay and care for you, mother. I could n't leave you like this, but Max makes it difficult. This evening he was angry because I looked at a man on the box-seat——"

"I saw you," interrupted the woman; "it angered me too. It 's bold an' brazen-faced to deck yourself up to flaunt in the eyes of strange men."

"It 's not more indecent than to listen to the love words of a man you don't love!" retorted Marvel, with quick temper.

"That will do," answered the woman coldly. "You can go, and send Max here."

The man came presently with the awkward gait of one accustomed to rough roads trying to step softly. He would have been a handsome-looking man in well-made attire, but his coarse, clumsy clothes disguised the fine limbs; they did not detract from his great height, however—he towered like a giant in the room. The woman's eyes dwelt on him fondly; she admired his strength the more because of her own enforced inactivity. There was something of yearning in her voice as she greeted him.

"Well, boy?"

"Well, mother?"

He knew her sufficiently to be sure that she had something to say, and her next pointless remark did not disarm him.

"What 's doing?"

He told her patiently what news had reached their obscurity. It was his habit. He had thrilling tales at times after absences, tales of profound courage. And to the mother as to the son the fascination of mountain lore was great. Marvel would interrupt frequently with queries of "What sort of a man?" "What did he say, how look?" "His sort is in what he did," Max would reply.

But there was nothing supernatural or miraculous to tell this evening; the brief narrative ended with, "There came a stranger by the coach." Then silence fell between them.

"Boy," said his mother after a long pause, "give her liberty. You 're a bit masterful; you take after me in that. But she 's like her father there—and he 'd have none of it. Love 's a witchery, boy, not religion, let the parsons talk as they will. The less duty there is in it, the more it fascinates."

Max had been sitting with folded arms and bowed head. He lifted his clear eyes now and fixed them upon his mother as though surprised. Something of unusual life in her quiet face arrested his attention.

"What 's lawful and right never yet satisfied human nature—it soothes the conscience, but it don't gratify the flesh. So don't set too much store by what you think a girl's duty if you want her to hanker for your company—give her rein!"

"And lose her!"

"Better lose her than wed with an unwilling mate. You 're not a coward in a general way, Max Hawthorne, nor a browbeater, nor yet a persecutor—don't try it on a girl."

His bronzed face flushed. He had not expected attack, and least of all from this quarter.

"I persecute!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"You 're not alone in it," answered the woman, as though she had thought it out till her brain was weary; "it 's in a man's blood to regard a woman as his prey. Some of us know it, an' some don't; the difference is in the persecution an' not the fact; but a man's passion

demands us, body an' mind. I order the girl about myself," she added grimly ; " but no woman ever expects to chain another woman for life."

" Are you against me then, mother? Don't you approve of Marvel for my wife ? "

" Approvin' or disapprovin' is neither here nor there, boy. If a man has set his heart on a maid, the experience of his mother is like offerin' him milk and water when he 's cravin' for strong drink. But I won't coerce her, nor have her feel that she must fly my roof for peace. I 'm fond of the lass—she 's my own in a way. An' she must be accounted for to her father."

Max started. Twice to-night she had referred to her scoundrel of a husband. His name had not passed her lips for years. The young man's mouth set. If ever he and Marvel's father came face to face it did not promise well for the meeting. Max hoped she had forgotten. In his new-born knowledge he realised his mother's shame and pain. He stooped gently and kissed her. The caress was unusual and unexpected, and the woman's lips trembled. So, not to see, the son busied himself about the pillows. " Anything I can do for you ? " he asked cheerily.

" The thing I want most is n't in your power. I 'd like better than anything on earth this night to rise from my bed and walk with my two feet along the shore. But you can set the lamp in the window if you will—the red lamp. Your father—I mean Marvel's

father—said it gave the house a look of comfort, and the light carried far."

"Damn—the match!" muttered Max. His hand shook a little over his light task, but he performed it carefully and without hurry; then set the lamp on the broad sill among the geraniums, and threw the window wide open again. As he turned he glanced surreptitiously at the pictured face on the wall. His hand closed as though his impulse was to smash his doubled fist in the smirking face, but refrained for the woman's sake.

"Feel any pain?" he asked presently.

"None."

Her tone dismissed him, and a moment later his massive head and shoulders were visible through the window-flowers, silhouetted against a clear sky.

A twang of a violin string broke the silence into which the woman had fallen, and a spasm of pain crossed the set calmness of her face. To-night memory was keen, regret poignant, and her eyes were eloquent of her unspoken remorse as she turned them to the shadowy corner where the ungainly portrait hung. The father of Max had cherished a secret hope for their son. As a lad he had, almost untaught, made sweet music on the violin; why should he not, taught, do something more than play well? The man had loved his money and hoarded it, but he had been ready to jeopardise it for this. It was his cherished scheme that the boy

should be above the common. And she, Mary Meredith, had made the dead father's wish impracticable; she, the lynx-eyed, had relinquished control of the hoard that was to have transformed the rough lad into a gentleman—something more, perhaps, a genius!—and permitted its squander and dissipation because of a smiling face. Her own flesh and blood had been put to dire straits because of her folly. She had tried hard to right him, but she could not overtake the vanished years. She turned her head upon her pillows, and gazed at the head bent low over the beloved instrument; her lean, long fingers—knotted at the knuckles with much labour—clasped in appeal that was almost prayer. Did he know? Did he ever guess? Had he ever suffered in his restriction—ever pined to be other than he was? His name was tacked to deeds of bravery; men talked of his daring afar off; had he ever thought of or aspired to a world she had denied? He had. His music was intoxicating his senses even now, leading him to something that seemed awful in its nearness, and then evaded him and left him faint with longing and disappointment. He was wrestling now with the bitterness of loss, feeling all his force puny beside what he had missed. There was to him something fearful in the thought of what he was beside that which he might have been, for the might-have-been seemed to hold the possibilities—a name that the world should know—and love. Love was Marvel, of course.

Had the world esteemed, she would have smiled. He thought in a past tense this evening.

Meanwhile Marvel had strolled to the shore. The evening shadows had lengthened and deepened, black and silver were substituted for crimson and gold. Above the snows great stars twinkled in their pearl-grey setting, and in the deep silence the wavelets of the lake, the splash of oars, a boatman's voice, and the far-off call of night birds in the dark bush were almost startling. The phenomena of nature, its calm and remoteness, did not soothe the girl, rather intensified her loneliness. "I am never lonely under the stars," she had heard Max say; but she was not Max: she hungered for flesh companions, human beings with human wills. Existence was not enough. At nineteen years this bounteous solitude was out of proportion to her desires. Her sensations were too limited for this magnitude. But she must remain. Her father had forsaken the woman who had fed both him and her. And now, when their benefactor was helpless—of course she would remain! The boatman's voice and oar-splashes came nearer, and, lost in thought, the girl stood unconsciously waiting for his approach. In this lone spot the freemasonry of comradeship overrides convention and habit; more than curiosity held the girl for greeting. As she waited, the moon rose behind the sombre heights, turning to dazzling silver every snow-crowned peak, picking out each falling stream and wave-crest,

intensifying the blackness of granite and bush. Presently a silver pathway opened up on the rippling water, and the boat with its singing oarsman came over it to the shore.

"Oh! pray make no mistake,
We are not shy,
We 're very wide awake,
The moon and I."

The boatman became aware of the waiting girl, and springing ashore fastened the boat to the rough landing-place. Uncovering his head he approached. Marvel recognised the man who had occupied the box-seat. She had been so engaged with the thought of him, had had the fact of him so persistently forced upon her, that his appearance neither surprised nor disconcerted her.

"It 's a fine night," she said, simply.

"Fine!" ejaculated the man; "the spirit of beauty has revealed itself!"

He glanced at her as he spoke, then turned and gazed at the scene. His attitude and expression irritated her. His absorption in nature was neglect of her; she had acquired the vulgar habit of deeming herself of first attraction; the compliments of passing strangers she regarded as a sort of homage due to her. And this man was enraptured with the sea and the sky.

"I despair!" he said after a moment.

"Why?" she asked in wonder, for he surprised her.

"I am an artist," he replied.

"Can't you paint it?" she asked without modification, and with her quick sense of understanding.

"My good girl," he answered with a touch of irritation, "if I could reproduce six feet of that mystery and splendour, suggest those vast heights, that limitless distance, those limpid depths, I should be famous! The whole world would n't be large enough to hold my name."

"How funny!" she said and laughed. He wheeled round at that and stared at her.

"Funny?" he queried.

"Well, so I do think it is," she replied, on the defensive. "There 's so much of this sort of thing about"—waving her hand comprehensively towards the grand panorama—"that for a man to be worshipped because he can copy a bit of it seems ridiculous, especially when the Creator of the whole don't count for much."

The man laughed now, long and musically, scrutinising the girl's displeased face the while.

"You suggest an idea," he said presently—"God as the unappreciated Artist. He has been called a Man of Sorrows."

"Is it then so great a grief to miss renown?"

He nodded, turning from her again. "Fame is the artist's dream, because it means 'I have excelled.' Fame, and a soul with whom to share it. That is a full cup."

He spoke more to himself than to her, and the girl resented his words and manner of saying them ; there was an aloofness about them, beyond her comprehension.

" The world is chock full of men," he added; " work alone distinguishes individuals from the crowd."

" Why should it be unhappiness to be one of many ? "

" Why ? It is insignificant ! Human nature is egotistic ! Even Divinity calls itself the great ' I am.' We are copyists, as you say. Mediocrity is neither of heaven nor hell."

" Are you mediocre ? "

Again he laughed and turned to her, amused. " If genius is close union with life, I have been a genius for a happy half-day, brooding in joy over my creations. I felt myself a poet, everything was born afresh within me. But you with your practical common-sense have narrowed my visions, checked my extravagant emotion. At the same time you have given me a vivid impression—I should like to paint *you*."

She crimsoned in the moonlight. But not with pleasure. She did not wholly comprehend his words, but she realised that she broke his highest illusion, that her level was his descent—condescension.

She turned away with rude dignity. " I forbid you to paint me ! " she said with decision.

He was surprised, imagining that she would have been gratified. She was an uncouth barbarian ; her

criticism decidedly unflattering. Mediocre? An imitation? Well, perhaps; perchance a vulgar imitation with his eye on the crowd. He had deemed himself a cultured critic, but this girl had pinched his self-respect; and, as a consequence, he resented her.

They walked along silently for a few paces, then he said: "You think it easy to reach the sublime. It is as easy as to stretch out this arm and reach the stars!"

He lifted his arm with an eloquent gesture, then let it fall almost in hopelessness, but he did not withdraw his gaze from the great expanse that flung silver daisy-chains from peak to peak of dazzling snow. But there was something in his nearness, stranger though he was, that gratified the lonely girl more than the beauty she had been face to face with all her turbulent, passionate youth. His personal refinement piqued and pleased her, though he goaded her by his assumption of superiority. She had little knowledge of the "great things" of life that might put a bar between them, and less did she surmise that her lack of convention might disillusion him of some preconceived conception.

"So I am not to paint you?" he said with an easy change of manner, bringing his gaze from the infinite to the finite attraction of her face. She felt the subtle change in his manner, the cheapening in his glance, and that something in her which was to protest later even to the making of tragedy rose now in revolt. She winced that the highest in him did not applaud her.

She drew herself up with a fine scorn full of youth's candour and imperiousness.

"I beg you to excuse me."

The manner and tone took him by surprise. "You are a stranger," it implied; and, with a responding impulse of formality, he, man-like, being checked in impertinence, was desirous of establishing his claim to consideration honourably. He presented his card. "I have learned your name, Miss Meredith, as you hear. Permit me. Good-night."

She strolled towards Beach Cottage slowly, depressed, vaguely conscious that she had disappointed the man. She did not know that the name "Wynn Winter" upon the card she held was a name that the great world had its eye upon, nor that she had refused with disdain an honour for which dainty ladies had sued. She felt at a disadvantage, and resented the position. Twice to-night she had been made of little account. The sound of Max's violin reached her and soothed her irritation, for his theme was sad. For the first time the playing of Max struck her as something out of the common. It had the man's strength and individuality, and an underlying tenderness. How had he attained proficiency? She had been educated in this last hour. "It is as easy to reach the divine as it is to reach the stars." Then how did some come at it? For herself, what could she do? Keep house and make her frocks. With new appreciation she said as she passed, "You

play well, Max" ; and his hands trembled over the strings at her unwonted praise.

Marvel was very quiet while she gave her step-mother her supper and made her comfortable for the night. Her manner struck the woman pleasantly; there was a new humility in it. Mary Meredith was surprised that night by a second caress.

Marvel's room was on the opposite side of the lobby to Mrs. Meredith's, and after her attendance upon her step-mother the girl crossed to it, although she could hear Max softly whistling in the sitting-room at the back, and knew by his movements and the gentle clatter of plates that he was preparing her supper. But she had no appetite. Occupied with new thoughts, she passed unconsciously to her mirror and gazed abstractedly at her reflection. But her unconsciousness lasted only for a moment. The untamed, beautiful thing regarding her roused to attention. The dark eyes softened and widened, and a half-smile curved the crimson drooping mouth.

" He said he would like to paint me." She leaned her elbows upon the dressing-table, and stared hard at her reflection, endeavouring to give it conscientious consideration. Was she beautiful? Max said so. Compared with the few women she had seen in this retreat, she was, undoubtedly. The colour and tints of skin and hair pleased her. She had never been so pleased by any face she had seen, except the face of

Cordelia Grey, the half-mad artist's daughter who lived at the Southern Ford. Without any connection of thought, the memory of Cordelia hurt her. She moved away from the glass, as though to hide her agitation from her own eyes.

"No," she said aloud, "he shall not paint me." If she could have put her sensations into words, they would have been to the effect that she would not be a tool of his art, one of the external aids to his greatness.

She looked round her chamber, as though in search of something not previously missed. It was not a rigid room like the one opposite, although as scrupulously clean and sweet. It was dainty with flowered chintzes and girlish prettinesses. But in Marvel's mood to-night the prettinesses annoyed her; they seemed to partake in some way of her new sense of smallness. She suddenly extinguished her light, and covered her face with the bed-sheet.

And Wynn Winter, who saw the light go out, uncaring that it was Marvel's, strolled back slowly to his hotel, thrilling yet to the music he had heard. "If I could do *that*," he said without cynicism, "I should have established my claim to consideration. What sensibility, what character and beauty, in the multiplied harmonies! It was n't the girl—could it have been the giant? There are two men worth knowing in this wilderness—Max Hawthorne the explorer and the violinist."

CHAPTER III

ON THE LAKE

ALL that concerned Wynn Winter was of a satisfactory nature this summer morning. His isolation was deliberate, not enforced. Travellers' tales had reached him of this treasure-land for the artist, with its wonders of light and shade, and he had come to see. Twelve hours had informed him the half had not been told.

He was not a man of impulse and quick results; laborious and engrossing study had led to his success. He was gifted with that sublime patience which is the right hand of genius. He lolled now in his boat, dressed in a suit of white flannel, his palette left at the inn, for he meant the colours and suggestions of his surroundings to do their will with his imagination before he commenced the work that was to stamp him great. Weeks, months, years—it mattered little, he could afford to wait. He had riveted himself to labour by his own will all the days of his youth; success had

lain at his heart just as a babe: he had thrilled at its smiles as a mother thrills at the smiles of her nursling; watched it grow to full strength and vigour, and open up a broad pathway for him with its compelling hands: but he was not satisfied, he had not reached the goal of fame. In this solitude he would remain until he had set the magic seal upon his name indisputably. The heaped-up mountains with their dim distances put him in the right—they spoke of time, of the majestically great that evolved from the infinitely small.

"And the evening and the morning were the first day," he quoted, backing his thought of patience. "And God saw that it was good—happy Creator!" he commented, smiling. "Happy the artist whose latest work is his best!"

There was some exultation and a little sadness in his face as he turned his head aside and gave himself up to the fascination of the scene. Already misty ideas were floating in his brain of a mountain storm and Marvel Meredith battling with the elements, barefooted, on a rugged track; and even when he fixed his gaze on the changing lights about a snow-peak, the vision came with startling vividness, the dark eyes with tragic suggestions in their depths, the strong curved mouth with its droop of lament. In that clairvoyance which is the vision of genius, he distinctly saw the girl standing with her face set to the storm, and the despair and courage of the young figure fighting its lonely way

among enshrouding mist. But the girl had refused to be painted. He would wait. Man's will moulded many circumstances.

Sculling lightly over the waters, the artistic sense nourished by the indescribable beauty of his surrounding, success behind him, a feeling of innate power prophesying for the future, he sang as he rowed, merrily as a boy :

> " A wandering minstrel I,
> A thing of threads and patches,
> Of tattered songs and snatches."

Into the rhythm of his song there fell the splash of oars not his own. A boat approached through the purple and white shadows. As it neared, the man was startled by the beauty of the oarswoman. Exercise had brought out all the colours of Marvel's face, its rose and brown tints, and bronze, and the gold glints in hair and eyes. Her sailor suit of dark blue serge folded away from the round full throat ; her brown dimpled arms were bare to where her sleeves were rolled above the elbow. The man's gaze disconcerted her ; surprised, also, after the rebuff of the previous evening, and the bosom under the loose sailor's knot rose and fell hurriedly, partly with exertion, and partly with the excitement of encounter.

" My mountain maid is splendid," thought Wynn. Yet even while he looked at her with the grateful emotion of the artist at sight of loveliness, that other picture

conjured by his inner vision a few moments ago crossed his mental sight—the cold shadows, the stricken countenance. He could not gauge his sensations exactly, but he felt almost as though he had hurt her, and looked at the fresh young face lingeringly.

"Like myself you have succumbed to the fascinations of the morning," he said.

"I 've been fishing," she answered without affectation. She looked him full in the eyes, a little resentment and questioning in her glance. Was he laughing at her?

He smiled; her manner suggested no potentialities of tragedy. There was a simple force about her, too, that pleased him, and, thank Heaven! she did not simper. It was his business to conciliate her, and study her expressions. They were varying, as he noted. At this moment defiance met his gaze. Caprice, independence, and an irresponsible and irrepressible individuality hinted themselves.

"With your permission," he said, "I will join you, if you will take my boat in tow."

She nodded assent, and a minute later he had taken the dividing step, then stooped to examine the fish at the bottom of the boat; not with the sportsman's instinct of admiration for their size, but absorbed in noting their exquisite sheen.

Marvel watched, easily plying her oars. Yes, it was exactly the same look of admiration he had given her

from the coach. She was putting him to a microscopic examination, unknown to himself, and her observation was keen. She rather lacked the intuitive as a general thing; but this stranger had quickened her faculties, and she knew that she and the mountains and the fish were much as one to him.

He looked up suddenly, and realised with some surprise that he had lost ground. The boat shot through the water, as in a sudden spurt Marvel bent to the oars. The easy swinging grace of her figure claimed his attention, but it wandered off presently to the ruffled surface where it caught the breeze.

The lake, secure in its great loneliness among the mountains as it was, had yet been the scene of disaster and unwritten story, lake of "the dark influence" or "sorrowing heart," it had been called, and Marvel, falling into the traveller's mood, told what she knew. She had a dramatic gift of description, and told a story well, and her audience of one saw, as she spoke, both personages and their background—men shouldering their swags and filing down the gorges; sitting by their camp-fires beside rivers swollen and formidable with rain. As she talked she caught Max's tricks of expression, and, seeing that she interested the man, who was familiar with many countries, but not with this, she threw herself into her subject. They were Max's tales she told; the clink of the ice-axe, the thunder of falling avalanche, the mystery of unfathomed

depths, the excitement of the climber, and the suggestion of limitless distance got into her words. The man was puzzled and surprised; last night he had acquitted her of any strain of poetry or imagination; another stronger individuality than hers took form at the back of his mind; he thought he had the key—she was intelligent, she had read.

"Have these things been written?" he asked.

"No," she answered sullenly; then added abruptly, "They have been lived!"

He had dethroned her again, she felt; he had more knowledge, more experience than she; he read her deception. Yet she had not meant to deceive, but offering him nothing of herself that had held him, she had offered him Max filtered through herself, and Max had held him—Max whom she tolerated, if not despised. Her performance had been a failure as far as riveting attention on herself, but it was artistic, in that it carried her audience past her.

But, man-like, not to be outdone, Wynn set himself to the task of entertaining; and he had not found it difficult to charm a company of grand dames. There was a piquancy in the position, and with studied care he set himself the task of beguiling the girl from her wordless resentment. She listened with aloofness while he praised her native scenes; but when he spoke of the far-away, she drew her glance from the distance and looked at him. Unconscious of the closeness of

her scrutiny he warmed to his subject, while his beauty warmed her heart. She was listening intently; and she never again heard or read a description of Paris or London but she felt the boat springing over the waters between the bush-girt shore, and saw the fair hair of the man who sat opposite, the delicate arched brows, the straight nose, the sensitive mouth and dogged chin, and the grey eyes losing their intentness and keenness in his introspective mood.

As he talked her own life dwindled, her horizon narrowed; he had seen everything, been everywhere, knew everybody except only this Fiordland that was all she ever had seen, and the handful of folk who peopled her desert. He took her up and down the *boulevards*, through picture-galleries and Piccadilly; gave her glimpses beyond her experience and feeling, opened a door here, showed her this man and that—the world of intellect, of men and women who made that world. She was silent, humiliated. It was abominable to dabble in a puddle of existence when out and away was the great sea. The man thought to interest, but he tortured; he floundered and blundered on unwittingly, following this experience and that, gradually disengaging himself from intricacies, till he struck a more personal track. He partly forgot his companion, though he led to the by-ways of personal experience, over the rugged bits of student barrenness, indicating mud and *débris* here and there. She followed his lead

more closely than he cared to ascertain, for she made no sign, except a sudden flush of anger as she realised that where she had failed—to interest him personally—he held her in thrall. It was the spell of the strong magnetism, the force diffused from an energetic mind; and as he struck that note of egotism characteristic of one who feels conscious of power, his manner became strangely gentle, even while he defied the antagonistic forces that had parted so slowly from his Red Sea. He told of repeated failure; the elevation at a little genuine praise; of the pretension and small meanness of mediocre criticism; of individuals who rose for a moment and disappeared for ever. And as he talked the picture grew to Marvel of a man solitary in a crowd, concentrated among distractions, and amid allurement and enchantment faithful to his life's aim.

When with subdued eagerness and passion he spoke of that last aspiration of his—the achievement for which he would count no cost, nor any labour or pain—he awoke to the fact that he was talking to a woman, and bent his eyes on hers in quest of sympathy. The hour, the remoteness, the simplicity of nature, had worked their spell of sincerity upon him—conventional reticence had slipped off like a garment which had no clasp, the yearning and indescribable loneliness of genius had him in clutch. He asked for understanding from the beautiful face; but she was smarting with the futility of her wish to chain him, to call him from all he had revealed

to the smallness where she was, and when he half rose in his eagerness, forgetful of his position, " Sit down ! " she called out sharply. " You 'll upset the boat."

He grew cool in an instant. " I beg your pardon," he said quietly, and sat with averted eyes.

The girl had missed her opportunity ; her irritation was a cold douche thrown upon the warmth of his rare confidence. And she knew it instantly, and felt suddenly bereft, small, insignificant. She watched him under her fringed lids moodily. He had paled, and his lips were curled in a little scorn.

" He 's sorry he told me ; he thinks I don't care," she thought.

A silence fell between them, broken by the oar-splashes and the music of cascades. They were near the shore, under the shadow of the forest-clad lower hills. The girl steered into the shade with the instinct to shelter him from the too hot sun-rays. He accepted the tribute with a gratified instinct of comfort, and examined the flora of the rocks. To tone down the sudden coldness of his manner, he simulated an interest in the girl's personal life ; but the pretence did not gratify her, and she quickly roused an emotion in him that was sincere : one of admiration of her honesty.

" No, I am not wrongly placed," she answered to some complimentary remark of his, " and I hate to be flattered."

She was surprised to find how true it was—compliments had been sweet enough to this hour. "I 've no story. My father was a cad who skulked and let my foster-mother work for him; then he robbed her and ran away!"

He looked at her hard enough now. There was a fine scorn in her manner; her cheeks crimsoned with shame.

"You love this step-mother?" queried Wynn, marvelling at her candour.

"I do not," she replied hotly; "but she gave my father all she had to give, and me home and protection. She is the sort of woman who gives always and gets nothing in return. I don't think I ever thought about it till last night, so you can judge of my gratitude!" She shrugged her shoulders and laughed derisively. "But since last night I am tortured by the knowledge of my debt."

"Why since last night?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied. "Something was said last night that opened my eyes. One may look at a thing for years and never see it."

He nodded his comprehension.

"And then all at once its details become impressed upon the vision."

"Just so," he acquiesced.

"Well, it was like that; I was face to face with the fact always, but I realised last night."

" And what then ? "

" The Bible says, ' Owe no man anything.' The man who wrote that meant to be kind."

She laughed again, and bent her body to the oars upon which she had rested. Her sensitive underlip trembled, but Wynn could not catch her glance.

" You hate to receive," he said with decision.

She looked him straight in the eyes now. " I should think I did. So would you if you 'd had as much of it as I have. I tell you it 's crushing. It makes you appear a sneak when you 're no sneak. Obligation cuts the wings of ambition. You can't fly when you want, not even when your cage-door is open. It 's your duty to abide by them who gave you sugar and seed, and you must abide. The sorrows of those who feed you must be your sorrows, though your heart does n't grieve, and their joys yours, though you can't rejoice. It makes you mealy-mouthed, dependence does, when your lips are burning to tell the truth. More blessed to give than to receive ? I should think it was. If I wanted to punish anybody, I would heap benefits upon them they could n't repay."

Her eyes had deepened their hue and flashed their protest.

" ' The meek shall inherit the earth,' the Bible says," he reminded her.

" Six feet of it in the end," she answered contemptuously. " The meek don't inherit the fruits of it."

"Good on your mother-wit," he laughed. "But you are not meek," he added encouragingly.

"Meek—I?" She looked at him gloomily, and yet with an eagerness that seemed to pierce his real sentiment. "No, I am not meek. I could not be. Meekness and youth don't seem to touch, somehow. Yet perhaps I might be meek if—" She broke off suddenly, and rowed hard, as though to dismiss the subject. He did not press the question, and she, after her surrender, grew cold again. He saw that, like himself, she regretted her confidence, that she had been kindled but for the moment, that reserve was her more natural mood; so he did not break the silence till their boat touched shore. He busied himself in the fastening, humming softly while she collected her fish, then asked suddenly:

"By the by, who was that playing the violin at your cottage last night?"

"Max Hawthorne."

"Indeed! Max Hawthorne, the explorer of Fiordland?"

He looked at her with surprise and interest. She noted the look and the attention in his face; her quick thought anticipated his desire.

"If you would care to meet him, I 'll tell him. He is my step-brother."

It was a new experience to take a subordinate position in connection with Max, but it was evident she

did so in Wynn's estimation. Max had put her first so long that she had regarded the place as hers. She turned away humbled. Her companion noted the dejection in her manner, and with an unusual sympathy said, as he turned to walk beside her :

" Thank you for your company this morning, and don't think of me as altogether self-absorbed and selfish, although it is true that I am dear to myself in that I have a purpose which I must accomplish. And I would n't feel like that about receiving if I were you. We all of us do it in one form or another, you know. We 're none of us unfettered from obligation, although it does n't always take the same form. Life would be a mechanical business if we were. We can't stand apart without connection. The giving is n't all on one side ; the recipient to-day is the bestower to-morrow— if not materially, in other ways. *I* am in your debt already. You are giving form to a fleeting imagination."

CHAPTER IV

THE STRONG MAN

WHEN Marvel re-entered the little kitchen of the cottage she felt as though she had been away a great time, and had learned many things in the interval. The simple familiar room had a new interest. The whitewashed walls, the onions and hams hanging from the beams, the tidy dresser with its brown delft, pleased her. They had in part lost insignificance. Wynn's words, "I am in your debt already," had put her in love with living. They had struck a chord in her generous nature that no gift could have done. Whether by accident or design, the man had pleased her mightily. It was bitterness, gall and wormwood, the realisation that her father was a thief, and that she herself had so far imitated him as to take without gratitude. Wynn had dropped the branch of sweetness into her Marah.

She dressed the fish deftly. She had been trained to industry, and the energy of her nature found vent in

action. Indolence and weariness were alike unknown ; her splendid strength made labour a necessity, and the exercise of her household art consoled her ; and although not aware that her own craft was skilled, she did thoroughly and largely all that she did. But while her fingers were busy her eyes wandered over the lake. At high flood, or storm, the waters lashed the strong steps leading to the porch of the kitchen ; but now Max's boat was fastened to the rough post, and lay high and dry on the shingle. Marvel's eyes rested on it for a moment with a new sight. Those dark wild nights its owner had penetrated among the dangers had fresh interest since the stranger had listened to their story.

The gravel crunched, the steps creaked, and a tall figure shut off the light in the doorway. There was a soft look in the girl's face as she turned it in greeting. Max saw it and paused interrogatively, his own expression lighting to receive her communication. But the words that were on her tongue seemed difficult to speak, and instead of mentioning Wynn Winter's name she made a trifling communication, and their simple meal was at an end before she had braced herself.

" The man who came by coach last night is a great artist," she said casually, and with an assumption of indifference. Her newly awakened passion was making her self-conscious. She met the steady gaze

of the grey eyes lifted to observe her with a half-apologetic look new to Max. Something in her manner pleaded.

" Ah ! he told you," Max affirmed. He knew the freemasonry of Marvel. Of course they had been talking ; she was already under the spell of this new personality from a city. Not a muscle of his face moved. He made confidence difficult. But it was not Marvel's way to deceive.

" He did not tell me he was great. I guessed that."

" Oh ! "

This was not encouraging. With a flash of petulance that lit her eyes and coloured her face, " Yes," she asserted, " I am sure of it."

" What do you know of greatness ? " asked the man, with some surprise.

The girl looked at him deliberately ; seeing question, not derision, in his face, resting her rounded elbows on the table and leaning her chin upon her hands, she answered him :

" I don't know much about it. You might well ask. This time yesterday I had n't thought anything about it at all."

This time yesterday she had not met the stranger. The unquelled savagery in Max rose to the surface, but he kept himself in bonds, remembering his mother's warning.

" But to-day—what do you know of it to-day ? " he

asked, a sore feeling that she had been making discoveries deepening his discomfiture.

"It seems great, does n't it," she answered, "to spend a life trying for one thing?—denying oneself all that goes to make a day pleasant, so that in the evening one's work may be a little better done than it was yesterday?"

There was a yearning and appreciation in her tones that surprised him.

"I did n't think you understood," he said shortly. The girl's words stuck. Were they a temptation, a punishment, or a reproach? Should he throw all obstacles from his path and follow the voice of his music wherever it might lead? If he had had the courage to do so long ago might he not now have had something to show? Perhaps he had been a coward. "Every man has n't the opportunity; circumstances strip him of his chance," he said sombrely. He spoke with a lump in his throat, and Marvel, who had been lost in reverie, came back with a start, and a new thought to torment and humiliate her. For a moment she was stunned, for until Wynn Winter had suggested the thought she had not regarded Max in the light of an undeveloped genius. How cheaply she had held him! She put out her hand and touched his.

"Max," she asked fearfully, "did my father strip you of your chance?"

He heard the fear in her subdued tones and saw it in

her eyes; his chivalry rose. Her touch consoled him. What was anything compared with her? She had been a reality in his life, all that lit its sombreness.

"Nonsense!" he answered, moodiness vanishing from face and voice; "music tugged one way, the mountains another—the mountains had it. Sometimes I have been tempted to abandon work and waste my years, that 's all."

He went out, whistling as he went, but only till the sound would not carry to the cottage; then he fell into reverie as he strode along. He had gone farther than he knew when the sound of falling water roused him. He lifted his head with a jerk, and at the foot of a miniature fall, seated on a slab of rock just out of reach of the spray, was Wynn Winter.

"The very man I wanted to meet!" he said heartily, springing to his feet and holding out his hand. Before Max was sure whether he wanted to take it or not, or fling a cold denial of comradeship in this man's face, he found the grey intent eyes and cynical mouth of the artist had softened, and that Wynn had said some very cordial things. Max was perplexed how to carry out his resolution to have no friendly relations with this man; he had pondered it on his walk. He was painfully anxious, without appearing a churl, to intimate by his manner that he wished to break free; and he stood awkwardly, while Wynn talked easily, making brusque replies. The disquiet in the eyes, and the

strong patience of the gigantic figure did not escape Wynn.

"By the Lord Harry!" he commented mentally, "these people are more difficult to know than the lions of a London season. What 's fame after all? 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet' here as Wynn Winter!" But while he thought, he was combating the antagonism of Max by that personal charm of manner which, like an opposing force, defied opposition.

"Sit down, man," he said at length. "You make me ache to look at you. The works of the Lord are great in this corner of the universe! I feel a pigmy in comparison!"

Max sat down, and in the act, although he was not aware of the fact, partly surrendered his will. He threw himself into an easy position on the tussock grass growing between and about the boulders. But Wynn noted that the look of strength did not leave him even in repose; he had a likeness to a splendid wild animal, ready in a moment to spring into action. The sinews stood out on his hands and wrists as his arms were folded across his broad chest. The lines in the weather-beaten face had relaxed ever so little, and the painter found himself speculating on the possibilities of figure and face in moments of intense passion or action—"the very strong man Kwasind!" quoted Wynn smilingly. Then in answer to the interrogation

in Max's eyes he told the legend, and while Wynn talked he watched the trouble in the grey eyes lighten, and the blood creep up under the tanned skin. Great physical strength had a strange fascination for the man of culture, and there was honest admiration in his manner as he concluded :

" I find myself in the position of the old man, who, following a narrow pass, led onward by a brooklet in the trail of deer and bison, discovers all further passage securely barred by ' trunks of trees uprooted, lying crosswise, and forbidding further passage.' ' We must go back,' said the old man. ' O'er these logs we cannot clamber. Not a woodchuck could get through them ; not a squirrel clamber o'er them.' I must sit down and light my pipe like him," Wynn continued, laughing, " and smoke and ponder "—he looked meaningly towards the towering forest and heights—" unless a Kwasind come to my assistance.

> " ' Lo ! the path was cleared before him,
> All the trunks had Kwasind lifted
> To the right hand, to the left hand,
> Shot the pine trees swift as arrows,
> Hurled the cedars light as lances.' "

Max laughed. " I don't know that the Government would thank me for working that havoc," he answered, " but we 'll go over if you like."

" To the Southerland Falls ? "

Max nodded.

"Good. Over M'Kinnon's Pass?"

Max gave another affirmative nod.

"It 's a bargain," agreed Wynn. In later years he asked himself if he had known all that M'Kinnon's Pass would stand for in his history whether he would have gone. And he could never answer; not even when his life was torn away from its deep foundations, for the glamour, not of the mountains only, had him in thrall. He turned his head to get a better sight of the gleaming snow-peaks, watched the mist coming down from the glaciers, then drew in his glance to the cascade near at hand, scooping a basin out of solid rock, issuing forth again in silver curve, to bubble and swirl in whirlpools in the rapids; over great boulders of granite, fallen giants of the forest, and masses of flora and fern.

The shadows had fallen restfully on the vaporous nook where the two men idled; they had passed their supreme moment when a definite rejection of each other seemed best, they felt a curious attraction each for the other. If Max had any pride in his own physical strength, it was a melancholy pride; the mental force of his companion was of greater significance in his eyes. They were neither of them at their best, each feeling the other's opposing strength. Max, with his arms folded on his chest, and his massive head thrown back, began to talk. Wynn had led him to a subject he had at heart, and while his clear grey eyes were fixed upon

the other eyes, both felt subtly that neither would be capable of petty meanness. One man, with his ungovernable temper in times of stress, had yet many illusions and much credulity; the other was quicker to see, keener to know, less self-giving, but still strong to endure. They both had an impression that the other was not lightly to be put aside, and as the two resolute young faces turned to each other, each man was thinking in his own way about the other. Max decided that his companion was not the common mediocre sort of fellow whose own performance blocked his vision to that of other men. Wynn was leaning forward a little in a naturally graceful attitude, with his delicate hands clasped round one knee; less in strength than the long-limbed man who entertained him, without any striving for art, but dramatically. But Wynn looked more alert. There was a soft vibration in the air, of water murmuring, a sense of nature's sufficiency unto itself; a supernal calm that was not easily disturbed, that affected each strongly in different ways.

"Has it never occurred to you that you may have mistaken your calling?" asked Wynn at length, when Max had come to the end of his story.

The young explorer's eyes grew sad and gloomy.

"I heard you play last night," explained the artist. There was meaning in his ringing tones of appreciation. He did not know that he had probed a wound. He took it a little too much for granted that the man before

him had not realised his own gift. There was a question in Max's face that asked Wynn to explain.

"The artist has a consciousness of his own—an imperishable soul—but it concerns him and the world to discover it. It is an uncommon thing to find a man ignorant of his own gift, for genius is insistent, egotistic —'I am the great I am' spirit."

"You mean, do I know that I can play the fiddle?" asked Max.

"Just so."

"Well, I do know I can. But how much or how little I have no means of judging, for I never heard one of the best play."

"There 's one in Dunedin now—one of London's 'stars.'"

A silence fell between the two men for a moment, then Wynn told what he knew of the violinist.

It was a tale of labour and triumph that dazed Max's imagination; the narrowness of present conditions seemed to close in on him.

"The life of art," concluded Wynn, "is a perpetual struggle and a perpetual hope. Its fascination lies in the fact that genius can never correctly gauge its own possibilities, and the artist is as frequently surprised at his own performance as the world is; his own individuality does not bind his horizon—it seems to extend as he advances. He is a slave, of course, bound hand and foot by the demands of his art; and yet he is freer

than other men because he carries his world with him, and is not dependent upon outside sources for the dignity and happiness of his life."

He smiled contentedly, no sarcasm on his lips. Max noted the softness, the triumphant note in the voice, that was so real in spite of its sweetness, and his spontaneity froze. That crushing sense of having been cheated overwhelmed him again, and he strode beside his companion silently till their ways diverged, then climbed till the lake lay like a jewel below. It was a kind of Calvary, that hill to him, and his cross was heavy all the way. Not till he had reached an altitude where the air was rare did he pause. He stood on a projecting ledge, leaning upon his stick, a solitary figure among the marvels of nature, space beneath and above. But he was too much encumbered, too occupied fighting a human battle, to be ravished or dazzled by what spread before him. The mists unfolded and wrapped him round, crept down the shoulders of the mountains and spread over the valley, rolled back again, lifted, changed from orange to purple, faded from heliotrope to grey, before he roused. And then he descended with the look of a man who has made up his mind.

"Mother," he said later, when he sat beside her, "I 'm going to the city—to Dunedin."

"To Dunedin!" exclaimed Marvel, who was in the room, and who became alert in a moment, all her latent curiosity looking out of her dark eyes.

Mary Meredith, who had as few words as her son, waited for explanations. None were forthcoming however.

"Anything I can do for you? I go to-morrow morning."

The woman searched the bronzed face, but its expression was calm. The tender mouth had the faintest shadow of a smile; the steady eyes were looking at something afar off—a dream, perhaps.

"There 's nothing amiss?" more affirmed the woman than queried.

Max turned from his vision and met her gaze. He spread out his hand—large and sun-browned, but with curiously lissom and long fingers—and rested it for a moment upon the patient hands on the coverlid.

"Nothing—not a thing," he declared. And then she knew there was by his insistence, but something that concerned himself alone.

Marvel stood beside Max on the veranda next morning, waiting for the coach. The dew was yet upon the jasmine and honeysuckle, and all the air was scented. The girl broke off a sprig of honeysuckle and fastened it in his coat, her eyes dwelling on his tall figure—clad on this occasion in a well-fitting suit of blue serge. Her face expressed approval, and a little pat here, and adjustment there, thrilled him with passionate longing. "Oh, if—!" Even in his thought he did not finish the sentence; it held so much.

With surprise the girl noted that he was taking nothing with him except a Gladstone bag and his violin. Usually he was full of affairs on these rare trips, but to-day he was self-centred, and looked like a man with one thought. She also had been wont to make requests and complain that she must be left behind. This morning she had contentedly speeded his departure. At the last moment she laid her hand upon his arm and said in a tone of entreaty :

" Don't bring me anything, Max, please don't ; I have all that I need."

She watched the coach depart, then prepared Mary Meredith's breakfast and took it in.

The woman ate and drank, then asked : " What did Max take with him ? "

" Only his violin," answered Marvel airily.

CHAPTER V

"VERY WIDE AWAKE"

ONLY his violin! Max hugged it to his side through all that journey, and its nearness, linked to his new hope, opened his eyes like love of a mistress. His back was turned to the mountains; he felt their might, but he would not turn back to look. Their wild splendour had shadowed him all his youth, chained him, and he, who but a few hours ago had upbraided a girl because she wearied of inanimate objects, was a prey to the same impulse—the desire of escape. But for her sake; always for her sake. He saw the promised land before him this morning, and all the trivialities and incidents of the way were interesting. The balmy softness of the air, the breath of pine and beech revived him anew. He noted the shrubs with their summer garniture of blossom, the dark patches of bush, white as from a light fall of snow where the clematis had blossomed. They climbed the hill slowly, leaving the witchery of Manapouri behind,

and the solitary bee-farms flew backward. Then came a sweep of downs, and a touch of home-life in the Cadet Station, lying securely back from the road. People from the station were standing about in their blue and red shirts, and an old man, seated on a box in a rough cart, had driven in with tourists' letters. But the figures receded, and there came the toilsome "wilderness," a rocky plateau, with no vegetation except the chickweed that forced its way between the grey slabs; then the excitement of fording the river in high flood, and there on the bank stood the Wilderness Inn, where Mary Meredith had worked and loved and renounced. It had fallen into decay, its windows were broken, the doors hung by a hinge. Max set his mouth, and drew a deep breath. It was peopled to him in a moment. He saw his mother's neat sombre figure standing in the doorway, a light of welcome in her face, with a lovely child tugging at her skirts and a handsome man beside her. The ghost of his past boyhood looked out of the window. But with a change of horses they were off again. The afternoon was late when the coach was changed for train, and when Max stepped from it it was evening.

Dunedin, the Edinburgh of the South, nestled between mountain and bay, bespangled with the golden stars of its lighted lamps. You could trace the tortuous streets and raised terraces by their fringe of light; the dark spires and domes of its churches and universities were discernible with their background of bush against

the heliotrope and saffron of the evening sky, warm yet from the sunset, and twinkling with stars.

Max wandered through Prince's Street, his heart throbbing with the excitement of a crowd and its secret hope. He jostled men and women as he went who turned to look at him. Now in shadow, now passing through a lighted space, he walked steadily on and turned the corner of High Street. In the portico and on the pavement in front of the Grand Hotel men stood in groups, but all turned to look at the gigantic figure that strode easily up the steep ascent. He paused to let a cable-tram pass, then crossed to the Princess Theatre, where the great violinist was to play. It was only at the theatre door he remembered that he still carried his violin-case and bag, and seeing an hotel a few paces farther, left them, engaged a room for the night, and returned. He took a ticket for the stalls and made his way through the crowded building in the same preoccupied fashion that he had walked the streets. The stares of the fashionably dressed audience were lost upon him. In his normal state he would have been self-conscious and embarrassed; but he had come to discover one thing—how much or how little he could do, and to gain this knowledge by comparison. If it were possible for him to attain to greatness, the love of Marvel might be his.

His seat was an end one, at the bottom of a row of well-dressed men and women. A girl sat next him,

one of a party who exchanged covert looks and smiles as Max sat down. The girl smiled also, then turned to look at him again. He felt her magnetism subtly, as he breathed the fragrance of the roses she wore, though unconscious of her individual proximity—the nearness, the feel of woman was the spirit of that one woman who made his world, and presently he was beyond that even, and for the first time in his life the want that had always ached in him was absolutely satisfied. The violinist had bent his chin upon his instrument and began to play. Max quivered, and bent his head humbly, devoutly, his stout stick straining under the pressure of his hands. A little while and he lifted his head again, his whole figure recovering from its dejection to dignity. It was the latent genius in him rising above vulgar envy to rejoice and glory in the expression of its highest conception. Self was subordinate to this witchery of sound ; he was emancipated from the platitudes of personal happiness or success, and in his approximation to the highest his mind became part of it, one with it. Time, thought, sense, was blotted out; all the harmonies of the heaven above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth were around and in him. He forgot the musician and became part of the music. The silence wakened him. He looked round dazedly. For the first time he saw the girl beside him. She was looking at him intently, her sweet eyes full of tears.

"Good-night," said Max, with the spontaneous civility of his mountain home.

"Good-night," she responded softly, and surreptitiously held out her roses.

He took them and went out. In the early morning he called at his hotel for the bag and violin.

"Are you sure," asked Mary Meredith again that day, "that Max took nothing but his violin?"

"Nothing, except his brush and comb and things for the night," answered Marvel.

"Did he say why he was going, and how long he 'd be gone?"

"Not a word."

"And you did n't think to ask—he 'd have told you," said her step-mother with some impatience.

"I did think," answered the girl with unusual gentleness. "But Max is difficult to question, and answers are not always easy. It is n't quite fair to expect a reason always for what another does."

The woman looked at her with some surprise as she bustled about the room briskly yet lightly. Something in Marvel's gentleness and desire to please struck the elder woman.

"What 's come over you?" she asked suddenly.

"Over *me?*" The girl was arranging flowers in a vase. She placed it on a table at the bedside, turning the choicest blossoms where the invalid's eyes could fall upon them.

"*Over* me?" she repeated with a different emphasis. "I don't think anything has particularly—except, perhaps, that I 've been thinking."

"Thinking of what?"

"Of you—and Max—and "—Marvel's voice faltered, the colour rose high in her cheeks—"all sorts of things."

A faint reflection of the girl's bloom stole into the pale face on the pillow, the light of the brown eyes reflected itself in the eyes that had looked out on life so long, hopelessly. She was rewarded for much in those words, "thinking of you and Max." The "all sorts of things" went for little.

"And what of me, child?"

Marvel's mouth trembled. "I wish someone could make you well; it must be awful—all the bright days, too, as well as the long night!"

Her step-mother understood the incoherent words. They were new sweetness to her.

"I don't suffer," she answered quietly, looking through the window.

"You must—in mind," answered Marvel passionately. "I should be wicked if it were me."

The faded face turned towards the young face working rebelliously.

"I don't know," she said contemplatively; "the spirited horse goes far when once it submits to harness."

Every speck of dust had been removed from the room before Mary Meredith spoke again. Then it was to ask a question.

" Do you remember your mother, Marvel ? "

The words were jerked out as though difficult to expel. How often and how jealously the deserted wife had thought about that dead first wife, Marvel knew instantly by the fact that the self-contained woman on the bed had brought herself to ask. In her new understanding she was gentle.

" No," she answered; " he never spoke of her, and I have no recollection of a mother except you."

Mary Meredith said no more. She offered no caress, and closed her eyes while Marvel stitched beside her. But she showed that she noted later.

" Now run away. It is n't nature for a young girl to sit still all day—get out-of-doors."

And Marvel went out and met Wynn.

" I have been looking for your step-brother all the morning," he said, and the glow died from the girl's eyes and face.

" He 's away in town," she answered, glad to deny him. " You 'll have to postpone your meeting."

" We did meet, yesterday," he replied ; " did n't he mention it ? "

" Not a word."

Wynn was puzzled at her manner.

" He 's a fine fellow—a genius in embryo."

"The world don't count its unhatched chickens," she retorted.

"True," he laughed, looking at her curiously, amused, yet not able to guess how he had offended. "Our friendship does n't advance," he thought; "it 's a beginning all over again—those sittings are among the unhatched chickens, I 'm afraid."

But he began at the beginning again, carefully avoiding any talk of himself or his work, studying the expressive face beside him softening, melting, glowing. As he talked, Marvel forgot her coldness and the abyss of temperament and estate that yawned between them. And Wynn grew interested in the Beach Cottage affairs; so much so that he drew a reluctant permission from Marvel to visit Mrs. Meredith.

Early in the evening of Max's return he sat beside the woman's bed. She, like the others, had resented his first approach, but he overcame her prejudice by his distinguished manners and personal charm, and the unaffected admiration of the young explorer's feats. While Wynn told her of Max's name reaching him in different parts of the islands her eyes grew like live coals, but when he referred to his musical talent she stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"What 's that to do with you?" she said in low, intense tones. "How do you know what might or might not have been? It is n't easy to understand why he has let his gift lie fallow? No, it is n't easy

to understand other people's lives. Knowledge don't always give wisdom; if it did, the cleverest among you would step softest for fear of hurting, an' speak seldom for want of the right word. I see what 's happened now ! " she continued, still in the same desperate, intense, subdued tones. " You 've talked to him of name an' fame an' impossible things, till he 's took the fever. Fool ! You 've sent him away to get his heart broke, that 's what your talk has done. Could n't you leave us in peace ? "

Wynn had risen, his face flushed, his bearing haughty, at loss for the key. His mouth had taken its cynical curve, but he stood in courteous silence till the bitter, hot, reckless words had ceased. A sound of wheels broke in upon the awkward, strained, painful scene. They stopped, and the Maori's refrain, " *'T was mother's little pickaninny*," wafted into the room. Then Marvel's voice, " Ah, Max ! " Then Max to the driver heartily, " Good-night ! " then in a softer tone to the girl, " It 's something blue," and " I asked you *not*," in protest from the girl ; then the footsteps approached, and Max towered in the doorway.

Mary Meredith and Wynn looked at him with question in their eyes; Wynn with trouble. Max answered their looks with quiet glances. His face was pale, and his mouth gentle. He carried his violin-case in one hand and a small parcel in the other. Laying the parcel on his mother's bed he crossed to the corner

by the window, and rested the music case against the wall.

He stood for a moment with his back to the room, then turned, smiling. "I 'm glad you 've got company, mother. I 'm ready for Milford Sound, Mr. Winter, any time that you are."

"Queer folk," commented Wynn, as he strolled to watch the effect of the moon rising over the peaks; "quite primitive in their candour. How the old woman's eyes gleamed! She 's mad for a certainty, mad with selfishness, afraid that poor fellow will leave her to try his wings. Destiny seems to have assigned me quite a disagreeable *rôle* just here. The candid critic puts his foot in it!"

He laughed softly, but looked perturbed. "I wonder if he 'll ever speak of it? There were self-surrender and self-restraint in that look."

But the moon rose and he stood entranced. By and by Max, who leant with folded arms on his window, heard the snatch of a song:

"We 're very wide awake, the moon and I."

"Ay," he murmured slowly, "and I too—wide awake."

CHAPTER VI

REFUSAL

"I'M sorry to offend you, Mr. Winter, but I can't sit to you."

Marvel's face was flushed, but in spite of the determination in her voice there was wistfulness in her eyes. She felt a mysterious, almost a yearning sense of pain at her own refusal, that surprised her. She had anticipated a little triumph, for it aggravated her to know how easily this man made his will appear desirable, even to Max, who, until the past few weeks, had been led by none save herself. And there was another jealousy, deeper. She would not lend herself to the fame that claimed first thought.

Wynn had taken shelter at the cottage from a sudden summer downpour, and stood just at the top of the kitchen steps under cover of the porch. As he and the girl had stood together watching the rain-cloud sweep over the water, he had taken advantage of a softness in her manner, and put the request which had gained in importance in his estimate.

"You have the prerogative of refusal," he said coldly. His lips tightened, and his face paled a little with vexation. He hated to be baulked, and his picture was burning in his brain. Was a mere girl to stand between him and his accomplishment? It was late in the day to meet with opposition. He threw a sidelong glance where she stood in chilling indifference to his appeal, leaning, it seemed to him, nonchalantly against the door-frame. She threw back her head.

"And I do refuse. I 've got my reasons. I can have them, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes," he answered impatiently, "of course, but I feel sure I could explain them away, if you would but express them. I am not the least disrespectful, really," he added, with a change of tone; "but you are so unlike other girls. You resent as an impertinence what is intended as an honour."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Tell me," he urged, "what are your reasons?"

How could she say to him, "If you loved me I should be your tool, but I will not be an aid to that art which divides us, nor help the fame that will be your gift to another woman"? She coloured furiously over face and neck, looking disturbed and conscious.

"Because—" She faltered and stopped. Her eyes grew luminous, lips tremulous. He might have

guessed if he had not regarded her so long entirely as a work of art. The lights and shades in her face attracted him as the changing light of the sky.

"A woman's reason, entirely convincing!" he interjected sarcastically, losing patience and tact.

"Well, then," she jerked out, "if you will have it you shall! What does your life matter to me? Why should I be expected to interest myself in it? I am not flattered and humble because you tell me I am beautiful. I knew that before you came. But a girl's beauty, I take it, belongs first to herself, and then to her husband. I might marry a man one day who would n't be pleased to have me admired—even in Wynn Winter's picture!"

She could have killed herself when she had said it. She felt like a Samson who had drawn a temple about her own ears. She had used her strength against him. It had been in her power to bind him to her by cords of gratitude, to serve him and win his esteem. But the cold cup of his esteem! She would not accept it, though she went thirsty all her days. Through the singing in her ears she heard his voice again, with emphatic emphasis.

"No, don't say that—don't refuse me! If your experience of the world were greater, and the living forces that make that world, I could make you understand. Your reserve is very beautiful, of course; I respect you for it, but at the same time——"

"At the same time you want me to forego it for your sake!"

She was conscious that he had drawn nearer, that his eyes were pleading with hers. He laid his hand involuntarily upon her arm, and the action, although it thrilled her, pushed her from him, for she felt instinctively that the familiarity would not have been permitted by one of his own class. She shook it off.

"Won't you regard me as your friend?" he asked, battling with the impulse to walk off and leave her to the undisturbed enjoyment of her own mood; another feeling pushing through his vexation—the wish to tame this proud untaught thing, tame her to his desire. He checked his perturbation by the reflection that she was excluded from civilisation, that she measured according to her narrow environment. Possibly the natives of these wilds had codes of morality he could not gauge, exaggerated ideas of modesty. The girl might honestly fear the judgment of the Mrs. Grundy of these parts. He knew her intimately enough to be sure she did not pose. She looked proud; her face and manner were instinct with genuine emotion. He had offended against some inflated notion of decorum, that was it. Her troubled eyes and trembling hands assured him of her genuineness from her point of view; he saw her wish to be generous by the pain she evidently suffered in refusal, and changed his tactics and blundered on.

" When we were chatting on the lake that morning —do you remember?—do you know what struck me most forcibly in regard to you?"

His manner had changed to a gentle persuasiveness Marvel could not resist. Something in connection with herself had lingered in his memory.

" What?" she asked.

" The generosity of your nature. You seemed to desire more than anything an opportunity of bestowal —No, don't interrupt," he added quickly, as he noted her movement of dissent. " I ask your pardon humbly for anything I have said that may have hurt your feelings—offence was unintentional. I am sorry that our friendship should hold misunderstanding, because I have very earnestly desired to please you!"

His words were coming quickly now; his keen grey eyes were softening; and as he stood a step beneath her, one foot upraised on a higher level, his hand resting on the rough wet railing, raindrops falling on his hair, Marvel was moved by his unconsciousness of surrounding things in the earnestness of the moment.

" I have a favour to ask," he proceeded, uncovering his head, " a very great favour, doubly great since you are so reluctant to grant it. You know to what I refer. In that first morning of our acquaintance I conceived a picture with you for the central figure. I would barter a good deal to paint it. But I cannot paint it unless you consent. Will you? *Do.*"

He laid his hand gently upon hers, thrilling her in every nerve by the magnetism of his touch and the tones of his voice. The last word lingered in her ears, coiling itself about her heart. His eyes held hers. She was not insensible, but passionately alive to every shade of emotion that he expressed; she felt as one without power to lift hand or foot, watching a scene enacted before her eyes! And all the time her brain was thinking how she would feel were he pleading for love's sake, not art. She saw him as he would look when he told that other woman of his love. How the proud face could soften, the eyes beam! Her bosom rose and fell with deep breaths. A short lifetime was condensed in the moments to both. Both were in deadly earnest, he to break, she to stand. It was a war of wills, and in the zest of battle he would have forgotten the cause, or disregarded it, so only he played a winning game.

She withdrew her hand, not trusting herself with those strong light fingers clasping hers. The action indicated that she still opposed.

It was a new and strange thing for a man of his position and calibre to sue so abjectly. He flushed crimson with this sense of lowered importance. He must reinstate himself; this sullen, soulless child had got to give way. It was ridiculous to suppose that she should mock intellectuality by mere brute force. He gathered himself together for another attack. He sketched with

imagination and warmth the joy with which he would labour; the final scene of his triumph, the Academy, and the beautiful girl beside him looking down from his picture on the admiring crowd; his gratitude and lifelong obligation. She saw the outcome only too vividly. All this was apart from her life.

"My looks, such as I have, are my own," she said.

"You are ungenerous. I have been mistaken," he said coldly.

The rain had cleared, and the scent of newly watered earth and eglantine was sweet in the air; the soaked creepers were lifting their sodden heads and shaking off a shower of drops; the birds were calling from the bush, and fantastic vapours unwreathing to show the sun-touched hills. This little corner of the earth was born again to light and sweetness. But it seemed to the girl, standing with hanging arms, and eyes staring dully over the lake, that no new day could ever come to her. Ungenerous? Yes, she could not but answer yes. She had a gift to bestow, the only gift she had, and she had refused it to the man she loved, because she could not participate in the reward; sent him away with curled lip and haughty eyes. Well, why not, why not? She was nothing to him! If she could have gone into his triumph with him—ah! then there was nothing she would not attain. If as his friend she could hold him and serve him, for his sake even, although she was nothing in his life, for his sake alone

she could forego—could be generous to the death—but not for that other woman at whose smile he would one day bow, for whose sake he would rejoice at all he had overcome.

She stood at the door for a long time, largely battling with her small grief, feeling it great. The effulgence of the sunlight fell around her unnoticed ; human passion made the joy and recovered peace of nature oppressive. The girl felt remote, alien from the bounty of the heaped-up mountains, the rumbling cascades. " No stint," it said, when she heard its voice, and then she turned indoors, imposing unasked tasks upon herself, granting unsolicited boons, as though to prove to herself that she could give.

" Think of yourself sometimes, child," her gratified step-mother said. " Youth only comes once in a lifetime, an' it is n't fair of folk to make too many demands."

" I 've been thinking of myself all the afternoon," answered Marvel, sadly.

" An' I 've been thinking about you, too," said the woman, with an anxious glance. The new humility of the young face troubled her. " Mind," she proceeded with decision, " I won't have you driven ; you 've been a good girl to me in spite of tantrums—an' remember I said it ! You 've been a good girl to Max, too—an' no son of mine shall drive you where you don't want to go."

"Max?" Marvel looked surprised. She had not been thinking of Max. Since the evening two months ago when they had talked of it before, the girl had lived swiftly. There seemed no longer any question of Max. The dying see no new possibilities.

"No," reiterated the woman, "I won't have you driven—not in my house. I 've given you harsh words myself, but that 's a mother's privilege. A woman can take from a woman what would be intolerable from a man. Two women stand the same side of the fence; a man 's on the other side with the barrier of sex between them. Mother an' daughter, child—ah! that 's the one relationship that allows all familiarity." She looked wistfully at Marvel. "I 've wished many a time you 'd been my own!"

"Thank you, mother."

"If she 'd only snap at me, an' toss her head, an' blurt out like she used to, I should get at what 's in her mind," thought Mary Meredith.

"We had some talk a while ago about your going. I spoke rough an' short. But don't think I want to hold you back from seeing life, child. Max an' me would miss you if you went, but we 'd manage; it does n't seem fair for you to serve us always."

"If you don't mind, I 'll stay, mother."

"Bide, then, child—there 's not much pleasure for you, but there 's as little trouble."

She had forgotten that a tragedy only takes the space that holds a man and a woman.

Wynn's non-success with his mountain maid disturbed his temper somewhat for an hour or two; but while she was feeling like a condemned criminal who must pay a mighty price for passion, he was free to enjoy.

It was necessary for him to visit a studio he had had built away from the hotel, and not far from Beach Cottage, under cover of rock and bush, in the full light from the lake. The building was completed to his satisfaction, and only awaited the disposal of his effects. The artist was precisely in the mood for active exercise, and went to work with a will on the unpacking of several cases. As the hours passed, and the transformation scene became more complete, that vividness of look lit Wynn's face that is characteristic of the artist when he subordinates matter to an idea. And although the studio was a means to an end—an accessory to work—the man gave it his most earnest attention. While Marvel wondered in an agony of fear lest she should be called upon to encounter the scorn of his eyes, they were brightening at sight of the exquisite tints of his silk and velvet hangings, and he was planning socialities. He 'd give a tea-party to Marvel and Max, and anybody else who cared to come; there were one or two visitors at the hotel. He had no design in this, it was

simply a social instinct. After the wandering of the last months, it was "jolly to have a den of one's own," he told himself.

Max went home a day or so later with accounts of the studio that wrung the disappointed tears from Marvel. She should never see it, and how she had wanted to see something that was not a log cabin or a cottage! She felt in sympathy with Jacob; ready to sell her birthright for a mess of pottage; jealous of Max's privilege of running in and out of the studio—first with a step-ladder, now with saws and nails, interjecting at intervals, "My! girl, I believe you! It's amazing! The pictures and statues, the china and things he 's got! It beats a museum!" She was constantly reminded that she had shut the door of paradise in her own face. In the daytime she could not distinguish the building among its surrounding beech-grove, except when the slanting sun-rays flashed a signal from its glass roof; but at night it shone like a beacon among dark rock and trees.

And when she had despaired of a nearer view, Max came in quietly and said: "Mr. Winter is giving a tea-party to-morrow, and presents his compliments and hopes you 'll go."

CHAPTER VII

A TEA-PARTY AT THE WORLD'S END

"YOU 'LL bring your fiddle this afternoon?"

Max was helping Wynn with a great green tub containing a magnificent palm. The questioner and questioned had the broad leaves of the plant between them, and could not see each other's face. There was decision in Wynn's voice. The palm was heavy; Max did not answer till it was satisfactorily placed in a draped corner of the studio.

"Why—no!" he answered slowly. The two men looked at each other steadily. Wynn had comprehension in his gaze, Max question.

"I know what you meant when you placed your instrument in a corner and left it there. You meant desertion—desertion of the gift that is in you. Now you know, old fellow, that 's cowardly, and not like you!"

Certainly not like him. He looked anything but a coward as he stood in a sort of remoteness, born of his

pride. The man of acknowledged genius was sensitive to hurt.

"The mere *dilettante* can be distinguished from the real artist by the fact that the first succumbs to outside influences. The divine fire burns unextinguished, although it burns away the heart that creates it!"

"I had but a spark!"

"But? Why, man, there 's many another who would give their life for that; it kindles the imagination, sets fire to the soul! How many great workers —*great* workers—men and women, who have built pyramids of patient construction in this desert of a world, never had that divine spark to light them! If you put your foot on it, I tell you you leave yourself in intolerable darkness."

Wynn was leaning against the door-post, not looking at Max, but at the mountains. Max's face was tense, every furrow deep, and the heavy brows drawn close together.

"It would lead nowhere!" he said sullenly. He had realised that night in town that it was too late for scientific progress; that the beautiful was inadequate without form; enthusiasm could not take the place of knowledge. And he would rather renounce than fail in completion.

Wynn felt guilty of having robbed the man of joy in his own performance, realising, as he did, the delight in the expression of power, as a thing apart from ac-

knowledged success. He wanted to restore this happiness to Max; he realised that the young giant must find relief in the artistic from that force of character which, debarred an outlet, would overflow and damage. That zeal of temperament finding itself impotent would destroy. The ideal would soften—be his torch to happiness. An inspiration seized him as Max went past him to the open. Waving his hand comprehensively to the magnificence of the surrounding scene, he said with a witchery of smile and voice that was almost a woman's in charm:

"And God *saw* that it was good, and rested." God had no audience, no appreciation, his tone implied.

"My first sermon!" smiled Wynn, as he deftly completed his arrangements. "By Jove! I begin to think there 's an embryo parson lying concealed in me somewhere—I felt a sort of exaltation—I! who have had no religion but fame. But had success not been possible could I have given—given, always given? Poor giant—poor Kwasind! Dear, too, unto Hiawatha, was the very strong man Kwasind."

"I 'm the Emperor of Japan! And I 'm his daughter-in-law elect," he began to sing merrily, as he unpacked the cakes and sweetmeats that had arrived from town.

Marvel's eyes were aglow with hope and expectation through all that morning; she felt like a criminal reprieved. All at once an illuminating ray had fallen on

her life again. The mobility came back to her face, the eagerness to her voice. Max seemed to be too much under the spell of the new personality to notice that it affected Marvel; his mind was full of fresh thought and he could not flit from one impression to another easily, or the girl would have betrayed herself in her anxiety to look her best. She had been closeted in her own room an hour when her step-mother called impatiently, "Is there never going to be an end to your titivating? Max has been gone this half-hour."

"I 'm ready," said Marvel softly, appearing on the threshold.

The grey face on the pillow kindled, she lifted her hand with a pathetic gesture, partly of surprise, partly in deprecation; the solemn eyes looked long. Marvel wore the "something blue" that Max had brought from the city—a frock of soft muslin. The woman was startled by the girl's beauty. The dress was the simplicity of art, but the coiled bronze hair under the white broad-brimmed leghorn hat, and the dazzling tints of skin and eyes could not have had a better setting. Pleasure had curved the drooping mouth with a half-smile.

Mary Meredith sighed. "Unlock the bottom drawer of the chest; there 's a lace fichu in the right-hand corner. Bring it." It was one of Frank Meredith's few presents, and greatly prized.

Marvel touched the delicate fabric with a little thrill

of rapture ; was she indeed to wear it ? She had worn so few pretty things.

" Kneel," said her step-mother, and the girl stooped on one knee. Mary Meredith knotted the lace over the full bosom, then gently released her.

" You 'll do," she said, and twisted her own neck crookedly to get little glimpses of the vision as it flitted past the windows.

From the sunshine and bracken Marvel passed into shaded light and subtle fragrances. She had a vague impression of soft rugs, Oriental colourings, gleaming statuary ; and approaching her with smiling face her god of the temple, in a black coat. He involuntarily quickened his steps as he caught sight of her and said cordially :

" This is good of you ! " For one delicious instant he held her hand, his eyes gazing full into hers, well pleased. In the next she became aware that there were others in the studio and obeyed the move of her host, who introduced her to a middle-aged lady whose look of haughty reserve and veiled sarcasm steadied Marvel's pulse. She seated herself in a wicker chair with crimson silk cushions that set off the pale blue of her dress and the colour of her skin to perfection. Beside her was a sweet-faced girl of timid bearing, and eyes like a fawn's. Opposite sat what Marvel mistook for a boy in the first glance, dressed in a man's frock-coat and grey trousers. When her eyes fell upon him

he was in the act of re-seating himself, his hands resting upon the arms of the voluminous cane chair he occupied, but at the beaming challenge of the dark eyes he nervously sprang to his feet again. "Miss Meredith, Mr. Anthony Algernon Armstrong."

The faintest shadow of a smile lurked about Wynn's mouth as he made the presentation, and Marvel flushed with the effort to control a merry peal of laughter.

"It is a man!" she said to herself as she looked at the fair guileless face and the straight, colourless hair and slender figure enveloped in the immaculate coat. Never had she felt the strength of the grim personality of her step-brother so much as at that moment; he stood near in an unconsciously graceful attitude, his stormy face softened by something almost protective as he looked down at the little man.

Marvel's entrance had drawn attention from the elder lady. She smoothed down her dark silk with an exquisitely gloved hand, and turned to Wynn with an ingratiating smile.

"So altogether charming of you to give a party at the world's end. But your migration has left London desolate. I hope"—she sank her voice a little, but the supercilious tones were distinctly audible—"I hope the barbarians are duly appreciative!"

The momentary softness died out of Marvel's face. Instinctive hostility and resentment took its place. The lady, by that soft stroking of her gown, had re-

minded her that she had forgotten to wear gloves! In a moment she was as ill at ease as the elder woman meant she should be. The brilliant beauty of the girl, her natural queenliness, had given mortal offence.

"I have been delighted with everything I have seen," said Wynn.

Marvel flashed him a grateful look.

"The Baroness," continued the lady, glancing towards the sad-eyed girl beside Marvel, "thinks the place a second Siberia. Do you not, dear child?"

"Do I not what?" asked the girl languidly, catching her mother's eye.

"Think these mountains oppressive?" said Wynn, offering her tea.

"Do I? I suppose so if mamma says it!"

"Who *is* that man?" she asked in an undertone of her host, indicating Max by a glance, as she helped herself to cream.

"Max Hawthorne, an explorer."

"I suppose I can't possibly have met him anywhere, and yet I seem to know him!"

But later, when Max was playing, their eyes met, and then they both remembered. It was the girl who had given him the roses at the concert. A delicate pink stole into her cheeks at the recollection. It had been a momentary impulse of sympathy, for he had seemed troubled, but she was not permitted impulses. Her mother had but just then successfully accomplished her

dear child's marriage to a wealthy Russian baron. For political reasons the bridegroom's return to Russia was imperative, but the bride's health was delicate, and the doctor had tabooed a Russian winter. When questioned about her husband she had answered, " It is possible I may love him when I know him."

She saw by Max's eyes that he thought none the worse of her for her surreptitious offering, and he strove now to thank her. He felt that she also had been baffled and cheated somehow. And as he hugged his violin he felt as a lover feels when his mistress has been restored to him. Something stole into his music that was not all yearning ; there was promise as well. He had the strangest, slightest effects, and Wynn, listening with glad eyes, fancied he heard the wind of mountain storm, and birds singing.

A hush was the first applause, then Mrs. Grahame gushed effusively :

" Thanks so much. Most charming, brilliant, in fact " ; then she turned graciously, and gave Max a list of great players and their performances; which irritated Marvel more and more, because of that certain something in Mrs. Grahame's manner that savoured of condescension and put her step-brother and herself miles away from Wynn.

" To me, personally, these people and their ways don't matter in the least," every glance and tone of the woman said ; " I am here because of Mr. Winter ! "

Mr. Anthony Armstrong, who had received such a shock at sight of Marvel's beauty that he was only just recovering when Max's music plunged him into a sea of emotion, suddenly emerged and crossed to Marvel. Seating himself on the extreme edge of a huge chair, he bent forward with an anxious expression on his small face.

"You don't leave here soon, I hope?"

"No chance of it. As likely as not I shall live and die here," answered Marvel, puzzled at his earnestness and the relief that leaped to the pale blue eyes at her answer.

"My impwession is," he said—he had no "r's" and substituted "w's"—"that it 's a countwy that takes some beating. The Old Countwy 's vewy well, but it 's old, don't you know. Life wuns in wuts. There 's the social wut, and the commercial wut, and the political wut, and all the other wuts, litwawy and artistic. Anybody wanting to take a diwect cut comes a cwopper, don't you know!"

A merry peal of laughter answered him, so spontaneous and musical that every eye in the room turned Marvel's way. Mr. Anthony Armstrong smiled indulgently, still bending forward.

"So I thought I 'd twy a change, Miss Mewedith, in a countwy that 's new."

"Before the ruts deface the surface?"

"Just so, Miss Mewedith."

"And how do you like it?"

"Pwetty well; in fact, vewy well, but it takes a little—little——"

"Navigation?" she suggested.

"Just so, Miss Mewedith. On the twamp, for instance—you hear a deal of the twamp at home, and the pleasures of twamping, but the sou'-westers are left out, and the fwying-pan!"

"You could n't manipulate the frying-pan?"

"It was nearly the death of me, I assure you, Miss Mewedith. Fwying fish in the open, over a smoky fire, is an art. The smoke gets into my eyes, and down my thwoat——"

"But why suffer such discomfort?"

"For expewience, Miss Mewedith; to escape the wuts. To get away from the beaten twacks and the public-houses."

Marvel looked puzzled, not to say shocked. The young old face was wrinkled with worry.

"I 'm heir to a bwewer," he explained dolefully. "I 'm a stwict teetotaler myself—not from pwinciple so much as inclination. I sort of smell malt, don't you know——"

"Tony," interrupted Wynn, "I want to show Miss Meredith my photographs."

Marvel turned her radiant face to her host, grateful for his attention. Since his reception he had not spoken to her, but all the while his presence had per-

meated the atmosphere. His every easy movement and gracious hospitality had delighted and reproved her. Her own brusqueness and ungraciousness were magnified to her recollection. A drawing-room and its refinement, its polite if insincere conversation, had been outside her ken. Mrs. Grahame's clap-trap and pretension had imposed upon her. If she had known Wynn's opinion of the woman she would have modified her own humility. But she had no enlightenment. She thought those pretty and effusive nothings the right thing, the finishing touches of good breeding.

With her superb shapeliness she looked a little overtall as she stood beside Wynn, and the adoring Tony looked up at her like an admiring bird. A pretty flush of flattered pride had mounted her cheeks, and Wynn marvelled at her glow and sparkle. His eyes had taken in every detail of her dress, the costly old lace at her throat, and felt grateful to her for gracing his studio.

Mrs. Grahame watched them with mocking eyes; but Love, the refiner, was at work upon the girl, toning down here, touching up there, and she passed the scrutiny triumphantly.

When Wynn went back to the elder woman Marvel held herself with greater self-possession. She inspected the studio minutely—the statuettes and half-finished sketches, the easel with its vacant canvas, the heaped-up miscellaneous assortment of the artist's parapher-

nalia, the copper kettle swinging on its bright stand; and it flashed miserably through her that she had deliberately shut herself out from the daily enjoyment of this.

When next she became conscious of what was going on she found that Max had taken the lead. He was telling the Baroness a tale of heroism. The girl's face had paled, and her sad eyes were burning with a brilliant fire. The nonchalance and impersonality of her manner had changed to quiet, concentrated interest. Mrs. Grahame looked uneasy, but Wynn and Tony Armstrong were breathless. Max's voice faltered as he ceased. Into the uncomfortable silence that follows deep feeling Tony's voice broke with a gasp:

"By Jove! that was out of the common wut."

Mrs. Grahame seized the moment and rose. It would not do for her dear child to think—sentiment was awkward. While she overwhelmed Wynn with assurances of the delight the afternoon had given her, the girl-Baroness found time to hold out her soft white hand to Max and say, "Your music and your story have helped me. Thank you."

Wynn bowed his guests to the door and returned to Marvel. Mr. Anthony Armstrong was craning his neck to look at Max, and missed her expression.

"Forgive me, I was rude. When may I come for the first sitting?"

Wynn clasped her hand in both his. "Dear girl!

how can I thank you? I shall be your debtor all my life long!"

Marvel cuddled to Max's arm going home. The eyes of both were bright with the joy of giving.

"My frock is *sweet*," she said.

"And so are you, dear," answered Max.

"I say," said Tony, getting breath as the girl disappeared from view, "I say, Winter, by Jove, you know! I should n't poach, should I?"

Wynn looked down, puzzled. The pale face of the small man was tremendously eager. A light dawned in Wynn's eyes. "Poach? I assure you, no!"

"But the other fellow—he 's an awfully fine fellow, and I should n't like to hurt anybody, don't you know."

"No fear of that; he 's her step-brother."

CHAPTER VIII

"THEN LET COME WHAT COME MAY"

THE autumn mists were casting fantastic spells, weaving weird phantom stories about the peaks, before Wynn listened to Max's suggestion that if he wanted to visit Milford Sound and the Southerland Falls it was time to be off before the sou'-westers made it impossible. Max was restless, and Wynn dissatisfied; for in all these weeks the artist had failed to realise the vision of Marvel as he had first conceived her. He had sketched and painted her in dozens of positions and expressions, till every line of face and figure was familiar; but no great hour of inspiration came. For Marvel there never had been such a sun, never such stars as had shone on these days and nights. Not that she deceived herself to hope; she saw the day of her bereavement—but the strength of the smart, the restlessness and dread with which she anticipated, so affected her that she held thought in check.

"Then let come what come may,
I shall have had my day,"

was her mental attitude, though she did not quote the poet.

She had played for no stakes ; she accepted the inevitable with wide-eyed stoicism and pride. She knew that neither the lightest nor the deepest in her could awaken the man about whom her thoughts clung so passionately. He could not move or speak in her proximity without its effect upon her. But she used no arts, tried no cajolery—her moods were the echo of the man.

He found her quite an incomprehensible creature, with springs of motive beyond his ken. Those hours in the studio gave her lessons in self-control that stood her in stead ; in the remoteness of his genius he spoke and looked from another world, and she watched him with desolate eyes.

Max and Tony Armstrong haunted the studio. Tony, in mountaineering garb, looked about fifteen. His loins were always girded and his staff in his hand ready for a journey ; a very bright and new axe and pistol gleaming in his belt. He was palpitating for adventure, but turned up regularly to the sittings, " A source of innocent merriment—of innocent merriment," as Wynn sang ; and the four young people had many a laugh together.

It was Marvel's last afternoon at the studio before Wynn and Max departed for the mountains. The sitting had exhausted the girl; it had been long, for some-

thing in her expression had caught the painter's fancy: but it was not the pose that had tired her so much as her emotion. To have those grey eyes searching her face, seeing yet not seeing her, looking past her to an idea; to submit to the gentle touch of the light firm fingers as Wynn adjusted her pose, and not to cry out, had proved well-nigh unendurable.

She left the studio quietly, unnoticed by the man. When he turned and saw that she had gone, he smiled curiously.

"She likes me less every day. Curious, the strength of her antagonism—how she veils her real self from me! There is no soul in her face—to me."

He walked from his easel, palette in hand, examining first one sketch of her and then another, closing one eye critically as he passed from canvas to canvas. Marvel looked back at him abstractedly, reproachfully, smilingly; the beautiful form stood erect, reclined, bent forward to, and turned from him. There was the living tint of her hair and the brown of her eyes, but the sketch that interested him most was the one where she turned away. There was a droop and dejection about the attitude that suggested sorrowing, and he felt an instinct to put his hand on the curved shoulder and turn her round to see if she were crying.

This was just the view Tony Armstrong caught of the original as he strode to overtake her. It would

have been easier to run, he would have made quicker progress, but stretching his legs till the wonder was he did not split in half, Tony came alongside. Marvel heard the bracken crunch, and turned expectantly. Her expression denoted, "Oh, it 's only you." Her pace involuntarily quickened.

"I beg your pardon for intwuding," panted Tony, with a skip to keep pace, "but I want to say good-bye, Miss Mewedith."

As he had been saying good-bye every day for a month, and had not departed, Marvel did not seem much impressed.

"Do you go with Mr. Winter and Max?" she asked, with some surprise, eying him sideways. "I had n't heard it."

"No, Miss Mewedith, I 'm going another way—out of the beaten twacks."

"Be careful the tracks don't beat you!" cautioned she.

Tony took three very quick steps and another skip, then answered breathlessly: "I 'm vewy stwong —wemarkably stwong, and I 've got my ambitions, Miss Mewedith. A voyage of discovewy is just in my line. Max and Winter will loiter, they tell me. Winter wants to study the mist effects. So I shall twy another woute, don't you know, and take my camewa. I shall get some snap-shots that will astonish the fellows at home. If I don't pwove that I 've

done something out of the common wut, they 'll hint at twavellers' tales, don't you know."

Marvel had reached the porch steps. Tony took breath, and looked up very earnestly.

"Well, be careful—don't go too far. Men have been lost hereabouts, and their bones never found."

The earnestness deepened in the small face. He said gently, "Oh, don't you twouble about me, Miss Mewedith!"

He became lost in reverie, his eyes raised to the beautiful face. Marvel nodded to him from the top of the steps.

"Well, good-bye!"

He snatched off his cap, but before speech came to him she had disappeared.

"I hope she won't twouble about me," he soliloquised. "I don't like to hurt anybody's feelings, but a man must stand his gwound, don't you know. Courage and will are the gold that makes the man; appeawances are the guinea-stamp 'an' a' that'!" He threw back his shoulders, flung out his leg, and strode on.

"He looks like a toy-soldier!" laughed Marvel from the window.

"It 's a shame of Nature to have packed a big man into such a small skin—his large impulses will burst him!" answered Max, with a slow smile.

"He 's afraid you and Mr. Winter will go too slow

for him, so he does not accompany you," said Marvel.

Their eyes met, and they laughed.

"He 's a gentleman, too," remarked Max; "he knows it 's manners to wait till he 's asked."

"He 'll distinguish himself yet," she said.

"You bet!" responded Max.

Max had lifted his head like a war-horse at sound of the bugle at Wynn's decision to climb; the call of the heights made him impatient to start. Marvel looked out at night to the towering star-lit peaks, and wondered at the passion with which they inspired men—strong as the passion for gold and the glamour of a woman. They drew them by their magnetism of mystery up to their cold heights and crystallised their love of common things; they held men and made it possible for them to risk life for a spray of eidelweiss. She turned away with almost a moan; they were taking away her beloved. She felt that a phase was past; that her hour was done. Things would not fall again into the same groove. But there was a touch of fatalism in her nature that forbade her to make ado. So she turned to her step-mother with such assiduous attention that the woman watched her with curiosity. There was a strained expression in the girl's face as the days passed, as of one who waits; she lifted her head at any sudden sound, paling at footsteps that chanced to pass; and all about the cottage was an air of expectation, the kettle singing on the logs, the trimmed lamps, the cur-

tains drawn late and undrawn early. This mood passed to the woman; but as Marvel's relaxed hers intensified. She was impatient that herself and her room might be trim at an early hour, eager that the red lamp should shine at the window before dusk had fallen.

"You seem to expect somebody," said Marvel, one evening, looking attentively at the woman's face. It looked strangely drawn, and the eyes were unnaturally bright. She had not spoken for more than an hour, and Marvel felt she must break the tension, for the silence was charged with thought.

"Do I?" asked the woman, with a restless sigh. "It is n't true, I don't."

Her eyes travelled to Frank Meredith's pictured face as she spoke.

Again the strained silence fell between them. Marvel was sewing, and the click of her needle against the thimble sounded distinctly in the room. A fitful wind had risen, bringing with it the dull roar of gorges and the beating together of forest boughs. Marvel lifted her head and listened, suspending her needle.

"What 's that?" she asked sharply, rising to her feet.

There was a ghostly tapping at the window. She crossed to open it, and did not hear the smothered cry from the bed.

"O my God!"

A gust of wind blew into the room, flapping the cur-

tain and almost extinguishing the lamp. Marvel craned her neck, and stared out into the darkness, drew in, and closed the window with a bang, shutting out the sound of wind and water at war.

" It was the vine against the glass," she said quietly, and resumed her sewing. But Mary Meredith did not answer, and the quiet of the room grew oppressive. In a pause of the wind, that went wailing into the ravines, footsteps were distinctly heard passing on the gravel. They passed and stopped, returned and paused opposite the window. Marvel caught her breath ; her eyes met the burning eyes of her step-mother. She crossed hurriedly and flung the window open again.

" Who 's there ? " she called sharply.

Above the roar of waters came a mild, deprecating voice.

" It 's me, Miss Mewedith ! "

" The fool ! " said the woman.

Marvel leant out of the window and laughed. " Why, Mr. Armstrong, I thought you 'd gone ! "

" So I did go, but I 've weturned ; I 've had some tewible expewiences, quite out of the common wut, I assure you——"

" Shut-to the window," commanded the woman.

" Won't you come in and tell me ? Do," called Marvel, closing the window, but not drawing down the blind.

Tony obeyed the unexpected invitation with alacrity,

but stood on the veranda rather longer than was necessary, peering into the dimness of the ivy wreaths about the posts.

Marvel led him into the kitchen, where red logs glowed. He had a very wild-blown, rather scared look, and blinked up at Marvel as though the sudden transition from darkness to light and beauty had half blinded him.

"Have you been seeing ghosts?" she asked.

"I—er—no," he stammered uncertainly. "Oh dear no, Miss Mewedith! I was passing—passing——"

"That 's twice you passed," interrupted Marvel.

"Do you ever feel a little nervous?" he blurted out.

"Nervous? I?" She smiled and shook her head, then added as an afterthought: "At least I never have before to-night, but a creepy-crawly feeling was coming over me when you passed. I suppose it was sitting still so long—mother was in a mood for quiet. It 's a bit lonely for a girl sometimes," she added, with a return of one of her old flashes of impatience.

Tony had been fingering his revolver, examining it rather carefully.

"It seems to me a bit dangewous," he said anxiously, "two unpwotected women in this lonely spot."

"Nonsense! What 's to harm us? But you have n't told me your experiences."

She sat down by the table, and leaning her arms upon it waited with a half-smile for him to begin. He

looked at her, meditatively, still standing upon the hearth, his legs wide apart, after the manner of a man.

"Just so, Miss Mewedith. I've had a most intewesting time: climbed where no man seemed to have been before, and took some splendid snaps, I assure you. But being off the beaten twack I could n't weplenish my pwovisions. I could n't find a Government hut anywhere, don't you know, and the mists blotted out the view and made it damp. But it 's a gweat expewience to bivouac on a mountain ledge. It gets into your bones, the stars and all that, and the feel of the solitude. So I weturned this evening for more pwovisions, Miss Mewedith, and as I was descending it got so beastly dark, don't you know, that I lost the twack and came a cwopper——"

Marvel's laugh was cut short by a piercing scream from Mary Meredith's room. The girl started to her feet, every vestige of colour leaving her face. But Tony sprang before her, revolver in hand.

"Miss Mewedith," he commanded, "stand back! I 'll go."

She pushed him aside with such force that he spun round. The next instant she was in her step-mother's room, appalled to see the woman, who had lain like a log for years, sitting up in bed. Her face was ghastly, and her eyes staring.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to the window. "Your father's ghost!" and fell back heavily. For one horri-

fied moment Marvel's eyes were fastened on a leering face pressed against the glass, then she caught her breath, and laid her hand on Tony's arm.

"Don't let him get away, but don't hurt him, Tony —he 's my father. And afterwards could you find a doctor? I think the fright has killed my mother."

Tony stared at the apparition, open-mouthed, for an instant, then saying, "That 's the fellow I saw pwowling about," went quietly out.

"Come inside, Mr. Mewedith," he said testily. "I can't see the fun in fwightening a woman into a fit; it 's beastly bad form, don't you know. There 's the door. I 'll be back pwesently."

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CHAPTER IX

"I SHALL HAVE HAD MY DAY"

"THE lake of the sorrowing heart" gleamed like a dark jewel in its snow-setting under the white light of dawn, but the windows of the cottage still glowed amid the darkness of their creepers, and a shaft of light from the open kitchen door darted into the water.

Tony, in his shirt-sleeves, waited patiently inside the room, resting from the self-appointed task of cooking. The experiences of the night had been quite out of the common rut; entirely unconventional. To have been of service to two women, and one of them Marvel, had thrilled him from top to toe with pleasure. He had found a touring doctor at the inn, who had stayed a long time. Of Marvel he had seen little; she had come into the kitchen several times with a stern white face; had scarcely spoken, but taking what she wanted, and casting a frowning glance upon Frank Meredith—who had fallen asleep in a chair on the hearth—had

returned to her charge. No sound had come from the inner room for some time, and Tony waited.

Presently Marvel came in. It was the first time that Tony had ever seen that weary droop of her head, and it stirred something in his heart; too delicate and varied a feeling to express. Marvel sat down with a tired sigh on the chair that Tony had set for her at the table, with her back to the sleeping man. She watched Tony make tea and pour it out, with a look that seemed to him one of quiet interest, under which he girded himself to self-possession. In reality she did not see him at all. He handed her a cup of the tea he had made, and watched her tasting it in an agony of apprehension and anxiety. Fortunately Marvel's gaze drew in; she became aware of the strained expression of his face, the intently watching eyes, the tip-toe attitude.

"Delicious," she smiled.

Tony came down from tip-toe with a gasp, and smoothed down his very smooth pale hair. The action was one of gentle encouragement and caress. It was meant in his mind for Marvel.

"After a night of watching was anything ever more delicious!" she said again, in an undertone so as not to awaken the sleeper. "How clever of you to know, and to make it!"

People have different estimates of heaven, but Tony's was there and then. Whenever he wanted to remember how it felt to be happy he would cast his thought

to the cottage kitchen, and see the girl between the fading light of the lamp and white patches of dawn that crept through the curtains, her large dark eyes smiling at him from a pale face.

She remembered presently.

"Mr. Armstrong, do sit down and have breakfast."

He was bringing something from the oven in a mysterious manner. The dish was very hot; he flung it upon the table and slapped his hand upon his leg, his fair face crimsoning.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mewedith—don't you twouble about me. I've scwambled you an egg. One of my twamping expewiences." He stood till she had sampled it.

"I have never tasted a scrambled egg like it before!" she said truthfully.

Then Tony sat down, burnt fingers and all trouble far from him.

When he had eaten, Marvel pushed away her plate, and, turning down the lamp, drew aside the blind and let a flood of white light into the room.

"Ugh!" she shuddered, "how ghastly it is, how wan and old we look, how tawdry the room! And look at the snow on the mountains, and the white mist on the lake! I hate the dawn; it is cheerless and hopeless!"

Before her companion could reply she turned, still shivering, and stood in front of the sleeping man, and

looked at him long and critically with eyes of merciless scrutiny. His limbs sprawled in the abandon of deep, exhausted sleep, his head thrown back against the high-backed chair on which he sat, his arms hanging, his feet stuck out, clad in unblacked broken boots. His trousers were frayed at the bottom, the dark suit was soiled. His shirt was of a dull checked woollen stuff, and a light tie of a loud pattern was tied in a jaunty knot round a collarless neck. Several buttons were missing from the rusty velveteen waistcoat, others were sewed on with white cotton.

Marvel bent lower, but with a visibly shrinking movement, and Tony caught his breath. He was in a fog, but he knew instinctively what the girl was feeling, what guessing at the repulsive sight. The tremor that shook her strong young body communicated itself to him. He felt a sudden chill, an impulse to draw the blind and shut off the merciless light from the dissolute face; to kick the man and tell him for God's sake to hide himself from the eyes of the girl. But he only glanced, irresolutely and nervously, first at Marvel, then at the blind, then where the girl gazed. The loose mouth was partly open, yet the lips seemed ready to form coarse flatteries; every line was horribly visible. The man's full fair throat had a bull-dog look about it; the ears were large and coarse; but, even in sleep, there was a weak, deprecating look about the face. From head to foot, from head to foot again the fright-

ened eyes of the girl slowly travelled, resting upon the thick hair that, between its patches of grey, had still a glint of her own hair about it. She saw it, and gave a stifled cry, and touched her hair, and hid her eyes.

" And that 's my father ! " she moaned, " and I 'm like him somehow ! Oh, I am ! It 's too horrible ! "

It was true ; debased, degraded as he was, the beautiful girl that wept at sight of him had seen and recognised that mysterious reflection of flesh.

Tony skipped to the window and drew the curtain, stirred the logs into a blaze, then stood beside Marvel, where she turned on the hearth, her back to the still slumbering man. She cried quietly for a moment or two, then with shamed eyes bent on the fire said, " I had been taught to think him a gentleman. Until lately I did not suspect otherwise, and gave myself airs on the strength of it. He would n't strike you as a gentleman, would he, Mr. Armstrong ? " She laughed nervously. " You 've been let into the family secrets to-night, have n't you ? "

" Don't you twouble about *me*, Miss Mewedith. I assure you I 've neither seen, nor heard, nor suspected anything that I shall wemember—I 've a beastly bad memowy, don't you know ! There 's only one thing sticks in it—the bwewewy and my own poor claim to wespectability ! "

Marvel stretched out her hand sideways, and, without raising her eyes, laid it upon his arm.

When Tony found himself outside, and alone with the morning mists, he bent down his face for a moment and rested it upon his coat-sleeve.

The girl sat by the fire quietly greeting, falling into an attitude of utter dejection. So this man was her father, Mary Meredith's idol! She had despised Max and his mother because of him. Thank God Wynn had not seen him! Over face and neck the crimson blood of shame surged. She rocked backwards and forwards, her burning face covered by her hands. Why had she been so tricked? Oh for that unpriced boon of gentle blood!

When she looked up again Frank Meredith stood before her, smiling superciliously. They eyed each other in antagonistic silence, the girl's elbows resting upon her knees, her face between her palms. Her gaze was steadier than his; he shuffled beneath it.

"Well," she said slowly, "you 've come back?"

"And damned sorry everybody seems to see me!"

She sprang to her feet, every atom of meekness changing in an electrical moment to rage and contempt.

"Cad!" she said in low, scornful tones, mindful even in her rage of the sick woman who slept in another room. "Coward and cad, use another word like that in this house, and out you go!"

Her eyes flamed at him. She pointed to the door. The man stared at her with his bold glance; comprehending as he looked that he was more than matched.

"Thief and coward," she went on, still in subdued tones, "to live on a woman's bounty, then rob and desert her, and then to come sneaking back with the toes out of your shoes!"

She swept such a glance of withering contempt over him from head to foot that he seemed to shrivel beneath it.

"Curse your impertinence!" he said, in a tone of bluster.

She raised her hand as though to strike him across the mouth, then desisted; her hand dropped and she turned away.

"Honour thy father and thy mother!" he said, with a short mocking laugh.

She moved to the open door and leaned against the door-post. The fresh morning air fanned her cheek, the native birds called from the bush a welcome to the red flush in the east. The ripples of the lake sighed all along the shore. She turned her eyes towards Fiordland.

"Honour," she said sadly, as though half in reverie; "that means revere, and no clean-hearted child can honour meanness and littleness, even in a father. It 's a bit rough on the child to be asked to do it. If you were a hundred times my father I could n't do it—not for the promise of a thousand years' life in the land. Some things are better than life; honour is one of them. I don't mean the sentiment of it for one like

you—I should be low down before I could reverence you,—but I mean the actual fact of it, the quality that makes a gentleman."

She did not turn her head, or she might have seen the first shadow of shame pass over the man's face that had touched it for many years.

"I don't honour you," she reiterated in sullen tones; "I don't want to—and my mother I never knew." The man's head drooped. He went back to his chair in the shadow. "Something in me that rises up against you feels as though she bore me in sorrow. If she did you 'd best not say it; I should want to do you a mischief. I dreamt once of a poor white face bending over me, and sometimes I wake with a start at the feel of hot tears splashing on my cheeks. That might be a dream—I don't want to know, but what I do know is"—she turned and stood before his chair, looking down at him fearlessly—"I do know that Mary Meredith fed you and me, and cared for us, and prided in us, and got betrayal for her pains. She 's dying now—it 's only a matter of weeks, the doctor says; and honour or no, Bible or no, if you give her one more hurt by look or word I 'll be even with you."

"Say on!" he ejaculated, all but dumb with astonishment that any woman dare tackle him.

"I mean to," she proceeded. "If Max were here you 'd hear less and receive more. But in his absence I 'll protect the woman who 's protected me. Only a

month or so ago I thought ourselves too good for her company, and pitied you." She laughed unpleasantly. "You fooled her once, fool her again ; you 've got to let her think you 're fond of her."

He sprang to his feet, a Don Juan in rags, but the insolent conceit of look and attitude was unmistakable. He laughed conceitedly.

"That old fright !" he exclaimed. But he did not like his daughter's expression, and left off laughing.

"If your two faces were coffined side by side I know which would be the nicer to look at," she said callously.

"Have done," he said. "This is sickening ; I 'm sorry I came. As you see, I—er——"

"Wanted money !" interposed Marvel coolly.

"It 's very humiliating—" he began, blustering.

"It is," agreed the girl. "But you 'll get the money on conditions."

He stared.

"The doctor says she must die," the girl went on drearily, "and when she 's dead I 'm to have two hundred pounds. She told me. It 's a little fortune she saved for me, to give me a start." The girl's beautiful mouth trembled piteously, and her hand shook ; for a moment she paused, but gulped down her rising sobs, and continued. "She 's slaved for the money, dressed shabbily, stinted her son. She 's never been happy—never——"

Suddenly all the girl's self-control gave way, her

voice broke beyond mending. She threw herself before him and leant her bright head against his soiled knees.

"It 's hard for a woman to die like that. Be good to her, and I 'll give you the money when she 's gone."

The sobs shook her body, she crouched lower at the man's knees. He was amazed. He had left her a young termagant, and returned to find her Mary Meredith's champion. His mind travelled back over the past, and the weak will caught at a straw here and there of better things; he saw the dead leaves of finer impulses float past on the stream that had engulfed him. His soul made ineffectual effort to rise, a shuddering passed through his frame, the flabby eyelids trembled, a mist obscured his sight. He touched the bright bowed head.

"Don't cry," he said gruffly; "there is n't a man amongst us worth a woman's tears. I don't want your money. Get up, and give me some food."

And so it came to pass that before the sun shone through the western window of Mary Meredith's room the man for whom she had pined for ten long years sat beside her, decently clothed, and nearer his right mind than he found conducive to self-esteem. His wife lay and watched him with eyes that made him shiver, a look of ineffable peace and joy making the grey face young. As Marvel stole in and out, with averted eyes, the man looked sheepish and sulky, his glance travelling restlessly to the open window; he was cutting an

unseemly figure in his daughter's eyes. And her beauty and strength appealed to him. Gad, she was a splendid girl! And while Mary Meredith thanked God in new faith born of her supreme hour, the man, whose hand she touched in timid appropriation, thought of the child she had sheltered for him.

"What a draw! It will pay me to keep friends!"

The woman caught his look.

"Does she please you—dear?" she hesitated.

He smothered the sensation of disgust at the touch of the cold fingers.

"She 's a beauty!" he affirmed.

"She takes after you," said the dying woman with a smile, and Marvel, who overheard, abhorred herself.

Certainly, all things considered, Frank Meredith made himself at home. He ate and drank heartily; threw words of praise to Marvel for her housewifely acts, and commended Mary Meredith for storing his favourite wines. After a good meal he would sink into his favourite chair, a relic of the Wilderness Inn, and talk eloquently of the world at large. Marvel, busy in her own small sphere, barely listened; but the undutiful expression about her mouth deepened.

The doctor came and went. One day he drew Marvel aside. "I 'm sorry that I must return to town before the—end, but my holiday is over. She won't suffer. She may linger some days, possibly weeks—but——"

Then Marvel knew that Max ought to come. But

whom to send? Tony volunteered, but Marvel shook her head. And there was no other man except her father. He did not count. Still Max must be brought.

Mary Meredith had been restless all day, and turned a yearning face towards the evening sky.

"You want Max," said Marvel sweetly. "Do you know, mother, I 've been thinking to-day I should like to go and meet him. I know every step of the way, and I 'd ask Cordelia Grey to stay with you till I come back."

The girl smiled brightly into the asking eyes. The woman stared till Marvel wished she might cover the glazing balls with her hand. She could n't let her go out into the great silence without a last word of genuine love! That trickster might fail her at the very last. She bent her soft cheek to the cold brow. The woman pressed her to her for a moment, then gently released her.

"Yes, go, child, if you 're not afraid!"

Afraid? Her heart bounded at the thought. Afraid where Wynn was! Then she reminded herself that all else must be as nothing beside the care that no eclipse should put out the light of this woman's late-risen sun.

As she wandered along the shore that night and watched the moon ride over the peaks she told herself that she had left her girlhood behind her since that moonlight night three months ago when Wynn had come to her, singing over the water. She had not a

religious mind, she could see no good in this humbling, her youth rebelled against it; things that puzzled her in the past puzzled her now. But out of her own heart-sickness she had learned pity for another woman.

Into her incoherent thought one recollection came as the moon had come dispelling shadow—she had done what she was able to pay back, to return the giving. But the debt had been greater than she knew, and her instalments of selflessness were late begun.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Mewedith, but I just happened to be passing by——"

Marvel had started at the sound of his voice, but said between laughing and crying as she turned to him: "You always do happen to be passing by when there 's anything disagreeable to be done—and I wanted to ask you a favour."

He held her hand in both his, and his expression granted it, even to the giving of his life.

"Just so, Miss Mewedith——"

"But I always seem to be using you, Mr. Armstrong —I forget that I have no possible claim upon your kindness——"

"Oh, but I assure you, Miss Mewedith——"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Marvel, drawing away her hand, "but because people are good-natured that 's no excuse why they should be imposed upon. It 's not for myself I ask"—Tony's face fell—"but for my

mother, and in doing this for her sake it will doubly oblige me."

Tony's mind leaped from one heroic deed to another. In imagination he was at his last gasp on a hero's death-bed, when Marvel's voice brought him back to common every day.

"I think you know that my father is getting restless here. *He must not go* yet, not till I return." She spoke with slow and deliberate emphasis. "Help to keep him; you seem to amuse him."

Tony coughed and blinked his eyes in his effort to look innocently surprised.

"I assure you," he stammered, "a little game of poker, perhaps? I—er—he—er—that is—we—er—have had a little game. Quite an expewience, q-quite out of the common wut, I assure you, Miss Mewedith!"

Tony's hand unconsciously went to his pocket.

"You have been a real friend to me, Mr. Armstrong. In the absence of Max may I tax your kindness a little more, then?" She smiled at him gently as she held out her hand. "It may be for hours only, not days—perhaps I shall meet them at the head of the lake. In any case I can't miss them, for I know the route so well."

"I wish you had let me twy my luck, Miss Mewedith."

"You will serve me better here. Good-night—good-bye." She went a step, and came back. "If I

miss them, please ask Max to be patient with my father till she—his mother—does not know. Tell him I ask. But we must not miss—it is hardly possible!"

"I sincerely twust not; it is howwible to contemplate! You 're a bwave girl to go alone. Suppose you should miss?"

"Then I shall go as far as Milford Sound, rest at Southerlands, and return—that is, supposing the weather holds."

"And if not?"

"I shall stay till it clears, or camp in one of the Government huts—there 'll be plenty of provisions; they have just been stocked, I know. There 's nothing to be afraid of, there are no wild beasts up there"—she smiled reassuringly at Tony's anxious face—"and no man would harm a girl. Besides, I 've done the journey often for pleasure. And there 's always Max, you know. I can't be lost."

"Good luck, then, Miss Mewedith. And don't you twouble about Mr. Mewedith, I 'll look after him."

He watched her tall figure with its graceful swing, now in the shadow of mountain and bush, now emerging into the moonlight, but never faltering, never looking back. There was something suggestive to Tony of no compromise, no half-measure.

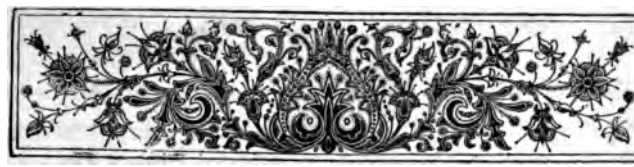
"She 's vewy stwong!" he soliloquised, "but her father 's an awful old wogue; still, there 's a kind of poetical justice in the pwoceeds of the bwewewy

weturning to the source whence it came. 'That which the fountain sends forth weturns again to the fountain. And if it enwich not the heart of another, its waters weturning back from the fount whence they came, shall fill it full of wefweshment.' My money 's like love!"

The little kitchen looked its cosiest to-night, and as Marvel entered it the familiar household things appealed to her like the faces of old friends. She wandered from the kitchen to the sitting-room, made bright with Japanese fans and screens and draperies, a concession made to the girl by the woman. And her small bedchamber with its spotless muslins and flowered chintzes, how fragrant and fresh it was, flooded with moonlight and scented with late-flowering vine! She leant from the window to gaze up the difficult way that she must go; she had made light of it, but she was appalled by the sudden realisation that she must be alone in the solitude of the fastnesses. If only Max would return to-night! But if not she meant to go. And after it was all ended she would go away alone. She had wanted to go badly enough often, but it was different now. Still, how glad she was she had stayed; she had been able to do one little thing. "My day will soon be over now. I can see well enough I 've been a sort of queen." Her fingers snapped a twig of passion-flower. She held it to the light and looked at it mechanically. "The nails, the cross, the crown," she murmured unconsciously. Then a sudden under-

standing leapt to her eyes, her beautiful lips quivered and drooped.

"Ah, how the nails must have hurt!" she cried. "I should have come down. I could n't have stayed there to suffer and be mocked!"



CHAPTER X

ON A LONG AND DISTANT JOURNEY

IN the white mist of early morning Marvel pushed out her boat from the shore; a phantom shore, enshrouded in a garment that part revealed and part concealed headland and cranny, mountain and forest. Ghostly peaks; ghostly trees; no stir of life in all the mountain solitude, and the deep-hearted lake lay under a pall, inert, lifeless.

The girl turned her face up to the lowering sky, as though mutely asking mercy, then, with a swift, comprehensive glance around, bent her back to her task.

For two long hours the splash of oars was the only sound in that deep silence, except the occasional harsh cry of the *kakapo* from the unseen bush. Now a snow-peak was revealed cold and gleaming in the eastern light, then blotted out by the enwreathing vapours, a rugged shoulder of mountain thrusting through to be in turn enwrapped. Distance was not seen but felt; the spirit of vastness and space called through the

gloom ; then gradually little ripples of surface water were seen, pale gleams shone through the forest, an enchanting light crept along the shore and outlined the cliffs ; the mist-curtain was partly drawn, and crawling in among the undergrowth on the shore were delicate tints of amber, and up on the snow-fields flashes of purple and steel announced a risen sun.

Myriads of cobwebs glistened among the bush like spun white silk, as Marvel, having fastened her boat, made her way round an arm of the lake by a zigzag path through a growth of underwood. The dark leaves and branches of the bush glistened with water-drops, and a rich aromatic scent of birchwood filled the air. The ripples of the lake murmured over the pebbles, and the feeling of great loneliness was lightened by a distant sound of a woodman's axe. Marvel halted for a moment as the sound arrested her attention, but went quickly on again as the deep barking of a dog gave domestic voice to the silence. A few more twists and turns and she came suddenly upon a hut-cottage built high upon piles on the margin of the lake. The cottage was built of logs, clinging to the bark of which were tufts of moss and bunches of dried forest leaves of amber and purplish brown. Three small windows faced the front, and a door, reached by a flight of rough wooden steps. The door stood open and Marvel ascended the steps ; reluctantly, pausing with backward glance. When she reached the door she stood

on the threshold and looked in. The room was long and low, the roof supported by rough pillars; arched roof-pillars and plastered walls were painted with birds and flowers and stars. The glass of the windows was also painted; on one, a white-winged yacht dipped to crested waves; on another, Noah's dove flew with an olive leaf, and on a third, Christ's face looked out in mute anguish from beneath its crown of thorns. The room was simply and quaintly furnished with rough chairs and couches made from branches of trees and piled with coloured cushions. Drawn near the hearth where the bright logs smouldered was a small table spread with a white cloth. While Marvel hesitated, the figure of a girl stood at the doorway leading from an inner room. It was months since Marvel had seen Cordelia Grey, and her beauty struck her anew. Surprised to see her visitor, the girl looked a little startled, the deep serenity of her face moved to question. Her eyes shone like stars in a midnight summer sky, her face was fair with that ivory-like whiteness that is not paleness, her eyebrows were delicately marked and arched, and her thick fair hair, combed loosely from the low, broad forehead, hung in two thick plaits to her waist like Marguerite's hair. Her gown was of a coarse white serge, half Quakerish, half nun-like in its style, fastened at the waist with a girdle. There was an aloofness, an exaltation about her look that set her apart from little things, yet drew the individual by its tenderness.

Her eyes were held by the vivid picture in the doorway. Marvel's cheeks were crimson as the hooded cloak that fell to her knees; clustering curls, damp with morning mist, peeped from under the hood; the great dark eyes looked out half timidly. There was a rare attractiveness about her; she brought the possibilities of the world and the flesh into this hermit retreat. A slow smile of welcome lit Cordelia's face—a face that looked as though no vanity nor any earth-sense had ever crossed it, nor misery, nor pain, nor vain desire. Its melancholy sweetness hinted at that leisure for contemplation which puts the individual in touch with the eternities.

"I did mistake thee for the sunrise," she said, crossing the apartment with a swift movement, more like the sailing of a swan than walking. She drew Marvel in and stood beside her, tall as she, holding both hands and penetrating beneath the surface of her guest's expression with a power and sureness that Marvel knew and almost feared. "All is not well with thee; thou art in trouble," she continued, the gentle "thee" and "thou" of the Quaker soothing the foreboding that irritated the other's heart. She led her to the fire, unfastened the red cloak, and stirring the logs to a blaze slipped to her knees and busied herself with making toast and tea and boiling eggs, talking meanwhile.

"My father is absent in town; we are undisturbed. He has gone to sell his pictures"—the faintest tinge

of colour touched the ivory of her cheeks, then she added—" if possible," looking with a complaisant smile into Marvel's face.

Rumour—such faint voices of it as were wafted through this desolation—said that was not always possible, and that the absent artist was a little mad. This was Marvel's first visit to the artist's daughter ; they had met occasionally, but to Marvel Cordelia was not understandable. Her tranquillity, that triumphant sovereignty of spirit, was so fundamentally opposed to her own impetuosity that they seemed to dwell in different worlds.

" Yes, I 'm in trouble, and I 've come to you," said Marvel, with her unmincing candour. And then she told about her father's return, her step-mother's illness and need of woman's care, and her own proposed journey. Before she had finished, Cordelia was moving lightly but quickly about the room, clearing away the remains of the meal, and coiling the long plaits of her hair closely to her head.

" Thou didst well to ask me," she said at length. " Go in peace. In two hours I shall be beside her, and will remain till thy return. Have no anxiety, neither for father nor mother. It is right for thee to go. Who didst thou say this strange artist was ? "

" Wynn Winter," answered Marvel sullenly, reluctant to part with his name.

" *Wynn Winter !* "

It was an exclamation of subdued delight; the tones of voice were a caress. Into the face and eyes came a look of eagerness that was a perplexity to Marvel.

"He is a great painter—my father must see him!" she affirmed. She looked quietly away from Marvel's face to the painted walls and windows with a little indulgent smile, as though wondering what view a great critic would take of them. And as Marvel followed the girl's eyes her own clouded—she hated the thought of Wynn seeing this quaint room with its indefinable touch of something akin to himself, and the girl in her heathenish habit, looking as though no smears, nor tears, nor any sort of grime had ever touched her. She tied a hood of serge over her closely braided hair, and Marvel tried to cheer herself by the thought of the inelegance of this attire; but the sapphire-blue eyes smiled back at her, illuminating the face under the simple hood, and her heart contracted with a jealous pang.

Cordelia poured brandy into a flask, which she placed in Marvel's wallet; then locking the door behind them led the way to the shore. The mists had cleared, and Manapouri was deeply, darkly blue amid its encircling snows.

"Good speed!" said Cordelia, and as she bent to push off the boat, kissed Marvel on the mouth. Marvel flushed as from the kiss of a lover, but not with pleasure. Abnegation and self-surrender were new to her,

and she was smarting at the old wound of pride from favours accepted. She felt the reverse of grateful to the fate that should bring Cordelia into her life with any degree of intimacy, and the kiss seemed a sort of pledge. She felt as though she had been unexpectedly plunged into the position she least desired.

She found when she grew quiet again that she had pulled vigorously to some distance, and that she had returned the bright and cheerful courtesy of the girl speeding to serve her with uncouthness. She looked back. Cordelia's boat was moving quickly among gigantic shadows, a toy on the gleaming water. Marvel waved, and something white waved in return. Then a jutting headland divided them, and a breeze blowing favourably round the bend of the lake, the girl set her little sail and sped onward, alone in the universe, with the secrets and mysteries of nature and the human heart.

Hemmed in on every side by gigantic mountains, that dipped sheer down into dark depths, the boat with its white sail and the red-cloaked girl seemed to be the only living things. Hugging the shore, Marvel scanned the surface of the lake with her dark, anxious eyes; but for the tragedy underlying she would have rejoiced in this swift movement and sense of freedom. As it was, her spirits rose. The wind had blown away the mists, and a fragrance of changing scenes opened up before her. Every change of sky, every cloud that

floated, changed the colour of water and vapours, now into a flood of autumn gold, now into a wonderland of purple and green. Then the breeze rose, and white-crested wavelets spread, and flocks of cloud-birds passed over the blue canopy.

With the waning day the wind fell, and, robbed of glint and sheen, the shadows were grey, and the mountains, grown higher at the head of the lake, were grim in black and white, and once again the mist came rolling down, obliterating and blotting out, while the little boat crept on, and the crimson cloak was dark and dim about the shadowy face. Then into the falling night came a radiance; the peaks whitened and gleamed, a silver light made luminous the edges of the cliffs, stole lower, and dusted the lake with steely flakes which piled in frothing rifts along the beach. It was a soft, indistinct, ethereal world, and as Marvel's boat bumped upon the shore she sprang upon the pebbles, and made it fast in a languorous dream, partly the outcome of fatigue, in part the influence of the night. But she did not linger to admire; turning from the shore, she sought the spot under the overhanging bush where Max on these journeys pitched his tent and usually left it until his return. Would it be there? Her heart leapt at the thought. Should she see a light shining through the canvas? She swayed and stumbled a little over the rough stones as the canvas of the tent shone among the dark bush; but the light was without, not within,

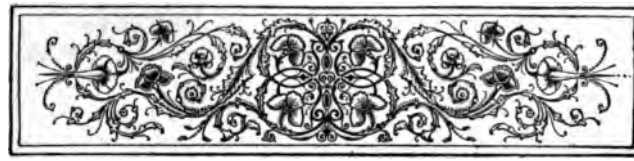
and the leaping heart fell with a strange desolateness as she lifted the covering before the door and went in. From her wallet she took matches and a candle, and striking a light looked round. A rug was rolled in a corner beside a bed of fern. According to the unwritten law of these parts a pile of dried fuel stood ready, and throwing it into a heap outside the tent Marvel set fire to it and standing before the blaze warmed her chill hands. Its ruddy glow leaped up and crimsoned the tent behind her, and lighted the forest, making great, quaint shadows on the rocks, and startled birds called to a fictitious sunrise. The warm light glowed upon the speaking face, and dyed to deeper red the gypsy cloak. The girl went down upon her knees and bent towards the blaze, enjoying its comforting warmth, then, filling a "billy" from the spring, ate and drank, and bringing the rug from the tent rolled it round her, and still sat on, thinking of the story that Wynn had told her of the Shawnee woman who followed a phantom lover.

She had no thought of fear. Alone among the wilds no hostile influence hurt her, only despair and the deepest discouragement. Once she had found Max, and his mother was at rest, there was all the world before her, but an empty world. Once she had craved to forsake, now she was forsaken. But sleep lulled her: she entered the tent and, rolling herself in the rug, threw herself on the fern mattress, and past, present,

and future were forgotten in the dreamless sleep of youth and health and weariness.

At daybreak she woke and looked out on an indescribable world, new wonders revealing themselves on every hand. The mists were at their fantastic conjuring again, sailing under clumps of trees, wreathing round snow-summits and unwreathing, now near, now far, and space was filled with melody of tumbling water. In an hour the girl had bathed and breakfasted, and with her bill-hook had chopped dry underwood and left it for the next traveller, and strong and agile, filled with the new hope of a new morning, sprang to the toilsome path beside the Clinton River. The valley lay through a mighty forest, strewn with fallen giants, carpeted here with fallen boughs and gold and purple moss. Cataracts tore down the mountain-sides, and dashed in foam to the river. Ahead, a magnificent snow-cathedral reared its pinnacles, and seemed to shut off approach to a city of snow-spires and turrets around and beyond. Sometimes Marvel cleared a path through undergrowth with her bill-hook, now she forded a stream, or clambered over boulders and logs to the other side. The green light penetrating the forest-aisles told that the sun shone ; vistas of gleaming colour, silver and yellow and purple from shining snow and rock and river, opened up, and tame blue ducks came and walked beside her a little, and timid wrens looked curiously out from leafy shelter.

At night she rested in a hut, where wood and food and blankets waited, and in the morning a brown Maori hen, with native curiosity, came in to keep her company. Then on again through a weird forest gully between mountains of granite and marble to higher land by a ladder cut in rock, and over a precipice from verge to verge on fallen rock. But still no sign of living creature ; only the sound of the rising wind swaying the highest branches, and the rush of water ! Through the dusky splendours of the twilight, the silver of starlight and moonlight, the red cloak flitted, and as night and day passed all the awe of vast solitudes fell upon the girl's spirit, a great yearning possessed her for the sound of a human voice. But she had no thought of turning, and went on through cool, soft fern forest, walking over the green fronds ; then she surprised a tiny lake in a mountain basin, covered with pretty green ducks and pigeons. All the trees here were very old, and Marvel wondered if Wynn had lingered here to sketch this ancient world of white and brown, with white marble background. Time with its fleeting passion was mocked. Nature had silently fashioned for ages, twisting great trunks and boughs, piling the glittering snow, filing the glinting stone. Could the same being that fashioned this magnificence comprehend the ache at the heart of a girl ?



CHAPTER XI

M'KINNON'S PASS

NIGHT came down under the awful shadow of Mount Baloon. All day the girl had strained to reach the hut at its foot, panting, eager, apprehensive. She was exhausted ; her splendid strength and courage had been taxed to snapping point, the strained muscles quivered in the weary flesh, and when at last she neared the hut, its little window was unlighted ; it stood in ghostly, uninhabited isolation, a speck in the surrounding gloom. Marvel lifted the latch, and, at sight of the grey ashes on the hearth, threw herself into the bunk with a desolate cry. She had so hoped to meet Max and Wynn at this point. They must have loitered at Milford Sound ; probably Wynn was painting the great Southerland Falls. Ten more dreadful miles of toilsome climbing—and over the awful pass ! How far away she was ; how high above her little world of Manapouri ! She conjured the cottage with its ruddy light gleaming upon the water—why

had she come? And then the dying eyes looked into hers in the darkness, and with a stifled cry she stumbled to her feet, and heaping the dry fuel on the hearth, set fire to it, the leaping flame dispelling gloom. After she had opened and warmed some tinned meat, had eaten of it and biscuits, and had made tea, of which she drank thirstily, she heated more water and bathed her weary limbs, then combing her long soft hair, she let it fall about her shoulders like a cloak.

These woman's acts beguiled her; her old habits of neatness prompted her unconsciously. She set the hut in order, then, wrapping her cloak about her, opened the door and looked out. A hot wind had been blowing all day, and the unseasonable nor'-wester had melted the snow among the glaciers, and an awesome roar of water sounded as the rapids tumbled down the rocky mountains and thundered through dark ravines. She craned her neck and looked far up at the ice-temples. Their height and magnitude appalled her; all her old fears gathered themselves about her; a star laughed down upon her for a puny mite, an atom of insignificance among indescribable grandeur. She covered her face with her hands.

"Max!" she murmured unconsciously, for Max loved these everlasting hills, understood nature and seemed one with it. But to the feeble human cry for mortal aid and companionship came the rumbling of a falling avalanche far off.

When Marvel looked up again, the moon was climbing from the underworld to scale the highest ridge. It had not touched it yet, but a black cloud which capped it was backed by dazzling silver, and the lower snows were luminous with light. A moment more and curving falls gleamed from surrounding darkness, then flashed in silver pathways down the black rock. A transformation scene of silver! And through the magic light white spirits came—floating in the air, melting into the sky, riding on dark ridges, peopling the ravines. And to the watching girl it was Cordelia—Cordelia with her white gown and star-like eyes, dispelling darkness, bringing peace, illuminating, radiating. Acting on a sudden impulse, Marvel put her hand to her mouth and sent the cry "Cordelia!" far into the mountains. They took it up and echoed till peak called to peak, "Cordelia!" and away where the avalanches fell—"'delia!"

"Good speed!" cried Marvel again.

"Good speed!" and where the untrodden snows were—"Speed!" "Speed!"

The fancy and the play comforted, and she went in and slept soundly as though she were not alone, "where none intrudes." With the waning moon the wind rose again, and all the principalities and powers of the air warred together.

Marvel with the first daylight sprang to her feet, the mountain echo of last night repeated in memory,

"Speed!" The tumult made her tremulous, a chill sharpness in the air notified that the north wind had veered to south. She looked out fearfully; yes, great clouds were marching in battle array over the heights. Before nightfall, certainly, perhaps before noon, a sou'-wester would rage. At this altitude it meant hail or snow. While she prepared a hasty meal, and replenished the wood-pile for the next traveller, a Maori hen came to be fed, and interfere generally with the domestic arrangements, carrying off a spoon in its bill, then returning for more biscuit. The bird was bigger than a fowl, without tail, brown, with fluffy feathers, long brown beak, and red legs. It was quite tame and fearless, knowing too little of the human species to fear. Hurried as she was, Marvel placed a little pile of food for its future comfort, and, shouldering her knapsack, laced her long walking boots securely. Her blue serge skirt came only to her calves to meet her boots, and covered a divided skirt, for Marvel knew the toils of mountain journeying too well to impede her own progress.

With bill-hook in hand she turned to M'Kinnon's Pass, and began the toilsome ascent. She had had too much practice in Alpine climbing to force her pace. With the quick eye of the mountaineer, she detected advantages and difficulties. The long spell of dry weather had made the road comparatively easy; but should rain fall, in a few minutes she would be

drenched, and the pass a waterway. With slow and sure footing she advanced, the bleak black rocks overhanging, the splendid snow-domes towering higher still. Up and up, sometimes in a weird mist-world, sometimes in rare white light, when, girl-like, she lingered to gather mountain flora, but always with the roar of cataract falling, and the wild wind. Sometimes caught in a terrific gust, she crouched for shelter as it went shrieking by, a fierce wailing spirit muttering imprecations as it went, and blinding snow-dust stung her face. She had calculated that she could do the ascent and descent into Milford Sound by nightfall, but toiling through the shadows, with the wreathing mists about her, limping, sick, and wounded, she realised that it was not possible. Up, up! She turned and gazed around. Piled together in confusion, heaped in hundreds, were the snow-peaks. No world, no anything but this.

Some nights ago, when thinking of a man who sacrificed, "I should have come down," she cried; but now she had no thought of recantation. She did not dream that she also was suffering her cross; if anyone had told her she would have been surprised. She was going for Max. His mother wanted him, and she was dying, and there was no man to send. Mary Meredith had been basely served, and life could only give her a very little joy at the best. There was no time to lose, because, although for herself there were years and years,

everything was over and done for the mother of Max. So up and on !

The terrible wind robbed her of breath ; she quailed with terror at the darkening day. She had not reached the summit yet, and if the rain or snow fell, all that had gone before would be in vain. She would be prisoner, if indeed she reached shelter for the night. If not, then death. She had not thought to die, not in the flush of youth and beauty. She had come to serve one who must. A blast of wind struck her, and she lay face down till the hurricane had passed, then up again and on. Right and left the peaks towered above the lowering sky. The clamour and warfare in the air ceased ; it became ominously still, then sweeping down came the mist-curtain. She stood alone in the clouds. Nothing above, around, or beneath. She felt the track with her feet, stumbled, fell, rose again, and strained up among the silence of ice-fields. Snow ! One flake falling on another, thicker and faster—perhaps in the valley there was gentle rain. The home-fires were lighted, and she was here on the cruel mountain-top, the only living soul in all that white, still world. And there was no returning, and no proceeding, and yet she blindly staggered on.

" A little farther," she was saying in her heart, though her limbs were numbed and the blinding flakes were stinging her cheeks and covering hair and hood and cloak with feathery down. By and by she would

rest, she must rest. She would go to sleep somewhere and get warm. She had heard—was it Max who had told her?—that one got quite warm under the snow. Why was she straining on, what striving for? The numbed brain and aching feet were almost spent. She had been so quick to start! Failed? had she failed? She could not tell; at least she had tried. Then suddenly the deadened nerves thrilled, the chill blood leapt at her heart, warmed, rebounded. A light! a little window gleaming in the snow-wild! A cry rang through the silence. She stumbled to the hut and lifted the door-latch. A flood of light dazzled her. A man in velveteen jacket sat before the roaring logs, singing: "*We're very wide awake, the moon and I!*"

"Wynn!" cried Marvel, in a voice that came from all her pent-up love and blessed relief.

He stared for a dazed moment at the figure in the doorway silhouetted against the falling snow, then sprang forward.

"Marvel! My God! Marvel, child, you—" He drew her in, and she leaned against his breast, while he bent over her, amazed, incredulous, devouring every feature in his eager surprise.

"Marvel—you? Dear girl, what is it?"

"I came for Max," she sighed, and closed her eyes.

Wynn half carried her to the fire; but for his encircling arm she would have fallen. The long strain removed, her brain grew dizzy with sudden relief. She

could not speak, but she felt the man's heart thumping under her cheek, and realised with an ecstasy of comfort that it was all right, his strength would not let her slip. She heard through the whirling and confusion of her brain reassuring and stammered phrases, and she cried out involuntarily, as one cries to an unknown power in time of trouble.

Wynn laid her on the warm hearth, touching and chafing her cold hands and cheeks, supporting her, lifting her up, removing her sodden cloak and boots, and pouring spirit between her white lips, drawing the beautiful head to his knee, its wealth of hair falling about. At last she had riveted his attention. There was only one question in his pale, set face. Why was she here?

"Max?" she queried when she could speak.

"He has gone! Lie still—he went days ago. Why? what 's the matter? Rest, I tell you, child!" He gently pressed her head against his knee.

"Gone? Gone home? Thank God! Thank God!"

There was such fervent relief and gladness in the trembling voice that he bent down to look into the pallid face.

"His mother is dying!" she said, turning to look up at him. "And I am young—and strong—stronger than you know," she said feebly.

There was such yearning and sorrow in the upturned eyes that Wynn marvelled. He did not comprehend, and he was all aquiver from the sudden surprise and

shock she had given him. But one comprehension came clearly through the confusion : she had come so far, on such a journey alone, that Max might see his mother.

For a time neither spoke. Marvel was occupied with thought not for utterance, staring into the fire, which shone on the bronzed head, picking out gold. Wynn, his features sternly composed, looked down upon her. She stirred uneasily, then, with a sudden flushing of the pale cheeks, attempted to rise. Wynn gravely and gently helped her up, placing a stool near the fire. She sank down upon it and turned her eyes away, lest he should see their light, and while he went slowly to bring her food she broke into bitter weeping. A sound of smothered sobs brought him back to her.

" Don't cry," he said gently, standing helplessly by.

She threw back her hair over her shoulders and lifting up her face smiled through her tears. " No, I 'll not cry," she said ; " there 's nothing to cry for, now Max will be in time. I 'm a little tired, that 's all. And it 's been so lonely, and the snow came on—" Her voice choked.

He touched her hair, and she imprisoned his hand with her own and laid her soft cheek against it.

" I 'd almost given in when I saw the light—I did n't expect you here—thought you 'd stayed at Milford. I must have passed Max in the mist on the lake. Have you remained behind to paint ? "

"Yes," he answered. His voice was so husky that he cleared his throat and said again, "Yes."

She had surprised him often, but she had surprised him most to-day. She had come on this difficult pilgrimage to serve a woman whom she did not love. And all her defiant bearing had sunk to a sort of despair. Never before had such gentle emotion for her touched his heart. He looked at her in vague uneasiness and perplexity, sitting there so quietly, with tremulous mouth and eyes turned away, with a stern expression of subdued suffering in her attitude. She was conspicuous in her beauty, but seemed unconscious of it, and of her bare feet resting on the coarse sack that was thrown in front of the fire.

He released his hand and busied himself in preparing food for her, bribing her by words and little attentions to eat and drink. After her meal she remained still silent, surrendering herself to the secret joy of his nearness. She trembled still from the remembrance of his arms about her, and while she looked so grave and passionless he hovered near, thinking grateful thoughts of her. He had gazed upon mysterious and enchanted Nature till his eyes ached with splendour; he had worked with passion, inspiration, exaltation; all that had baffled him had receded, and as he sat conjuring his dream picture she stood at the door with that desperate look of fighting in her face that he had seen in his vision, and the mist and snow about her hair.

The artist was still sharing with the man. But how about her position here with him alone?

No thought came to her of the strangeness of it; she was too tired to criticise or analyse. The experience of the past days, with their terror and solitude and strenuous effort, had culminated in grateful acceptation of warmth and companionship.

"I 'm so glad," she said, breaking the silence, "that Max has gone!"

She had no thought, he saw, except for the meeting of mother and son.

"He is at Manapouri long before now. I stayed to study the mist effects." He moved about uneasily and peered through the tiny window. "Snowing hard!" he muttered.

She shuddered, and came to his side, peering over his shoulder. He felt her breath upon his neck, her soft bosom touched his shoulder. She was absorbed in the night and did not notice his face.

"You are not afraid?" he asked in a curious voice.

She turned quickly to look at him, pushing back her hair. "Oh, but I am!" she answered him in simple truth, meeting his eyes with pupils wide with her thought. "I am afraid. Once I laughed at fear, but somehow—perhaps I 'm a little tired—all the awfulness of these mountains has got into my heart, and last night, when I lay beneath the shadow of Mount Baloon, I trembled with fear. One feels so helpless,

of no importance, it seems no use to wish and waste breath in prayer. God does not measure time, and we 're always in a hurry for what we ask ! "

He smiled. His grey eyes lightened. " So you did n't say your prayers last night ? " She shook her head.

" I rested all I could, and just came on."

" You fatalist ! " he said, still watching her ; " and honest through and through ! Well, if there was less intercession and more individual effort, there 'd be bigger results ! "

She looked at him earnestly. " It must be nice to have something definite to do," she said presently. She went back to the fire and gazed into it abstractedly.

" I did n't tell you my father had returned," she said abruptly, not looking his way.

" No ! " He went forward, interested.

" Yes, he sneaked back like he sneaked off. Tony took him for a burglar "—she laughed curiously—" and he was n't far out : he came to steal from the woman he 'd robbed before, and I threatened to kill him."

Wynn was startled by the passion in her voice. Her face flushed and her eyes sparkled. She looked at him squarely. He moved nearer. They stood absorbed in each other. He had grown familiar with her moods in the days of their intimacy in his studio, but this was a new one.

" Girl ! " he said reprovingly and yet with gentle emphasis.

" He is a coward ! " she went on, removing some dead leaves from the velvet coat he wore, her eyes bent on his sleeve. He could not tell whether she spoke in extenuation of her thought, or meant to imply that she had only used the threat to subdue.

" He had done harm : he was to blame, and she had waited for his coming so long, and the shock was too much. So I told him if he—would pretend—to love her, I 'd give him all the money I 'd got."

Her looks stole up to his face to see how he took the announcement, torn between her hope that he would not despise her for being the child of such a man and her fear that he would blame her. She patted and brushed his sleeve nervously. He laid his hand upon her restless fingers.

" Dear girl," he said pityingly, and his eyes were soft.

" Oh ! " she cried appealingly, " I was so afraid you would n't understand ! Max will be angry. There 'll be trouble when his mother is not there ; for her sake he 'll choke his anger down, but it will blaze up all the fiercer afterwards."

" And you ? "

She gazed up at him, surprised and fascinated. That he should think of her was a new revelation.

" Me ? " she queried ; then her face blanched suddenly, and her eyes were piteous. " Oh, I shall go."

" Not with him ? " he asked sharply.

" Not with him," she answered, a strange quiet and

dignity coming into her manner as she moved away. "I shall go alone—I 've always wanted to see the world." She threw the door open as she spoke, and a gust blew into the room. "Oh, how it snows!"

He joined her where she stood, the blinding drift whirling in their faces. All the world was blotted out. They two were shut in on the mountain-top alone. She shuddered.

"But for you," she said, "I should be lying out there under the snow."

He drew her in and shut the door, shaking the flakes off his coat impatiently. "Don't make me your providence!" he said gruffly; "I want saving myself."

She laughed a little, and shook the snow from her hair. This was her compensating bliss, to have him from all the world for these few hours. Gold could not have purchased what the blind storm compelled. She had come a lonely way for conscience' sake, and it had ended here. She had done what she could, and thinking would not place her beside Mary Meredith's bed. And before the light was quenched from her youth for ever it was to shine for a little.

She looked at Wynn for a long time unobserved. His fair head was bent, he was straining his eyes through the blurred glass.

"Won't you come and sit down and talk to me?" she asked.

CHAPTER XII

UNTRODDEN SNOW

"TALK to you?" he said, turning instantly. "Of course I will!" He seated himself leisurely upon a stool, facing her on the hearth, his legs crossed, his delicate, well-kept hands clasping his knee. It struck Marvel how spick-and-span he looked with his pale-blue flannel shirt and brown velveteen coat. The men she had known did not dress as carefully alone upon the mountain-top as though expecting company. Every instinct of the girl gathered to approve him. Her heart showed itself in her eyes; but he did not read them, he was listening to the storm. The wind moaned about them, a gust blew down the broad chimney and puffed out smoke and sparks.

"*Here 's a state of things!*" he quoted from his favourite *Mikado*. The smile that accompanied the words was faint, and melted as he met the girl's eyes. She was overwhelmed, he thought, by consideration of her position; but, instead, worship and entreaty were

crying out to him that he would not tire of her for a little while, although there was nothing of hers that could hold or satisfy him. Her throat was dry with the ache of her heart, but she smiled with appealing sweetness.

" Indeed, I shall think of it years and years, until I come to die," she said, controlling her voice so that he did not comprehend.

" It is hard on you," he responded with emotion, but he did not speak of what she had been thinking—her world was not his conventional world. He spoke from the commonplaces.

She laughed, and he looked up. " It may be hard on both of us if this storm keeps on. I take it you 're not afraid to die, but what do you say to the snow being piled on you ; piled so high above the hut that no one could find us if they came ? "

The colour of the fire seemed to flame beneath her skin, her eyes to catch its light. He nursed his knee, and studied her. She did not fear the thing he conjured ; no, she was not afraid.

" I should not make a row," she said quietly. But when he looked into the fire again it was a red blindness. His world, his goal within sight, was he to lose ?—to be crushed out by the blind, unreasoning force of the storm ? Her mind, as always, robbed him of part of its freedom; she communicated to him always some check on the spontaneity in himself. As if to put

her in the right, the wind took the little hut in its hands, and shook it as though in savage determination to overthrow. Had it been worth while to learn and work ; to sow if he might never reap ?

She knew she had stabbed him somehow; his delicate nostrils quivered. She watched curiously, at a loss for a clue. He met her eyes.

" How cold you are ! " he cried, protest in his voice, impatience in his eyes. " You sit there like a statue, and calmly talk of all things ending for us——"

" Because I don't care ! " she interjected.

He had risen, and waved aside her interruption impatiently.

" They shall *not* end—shall not ! Do you hear, girl ? shall not ! I defy the storm to blot either of us from the face of the earth as though we had not lived."

" Are you mad ? " she asked.

" No," he said, with a sudden quiet and curious smile, " I am as sane as I ever have been, and determined. ' A man's works live after him,' and while we are cut off from all the world I will paint my picture. If we die, don't you see we shall yet live ? It is so puny to be wholly done with by the worms."

She saw his meaning now—his art was to claim him even in this hour, her rival still. She woke with a clear mind from her little dream of happiness—she *could* not content him even for an hour.

" Marvel," he said, pleading for the truth and right

that was in him, "I never was a peaceful soul that could sit down and say, 'It is the will of God,' and not fight what seemed inevitable. And I 'm not content for blind, blundering Nature to put her foot on my intention and stamp it out. If die it is, I 'll work till the last. Prayer won't avail us, girl; work is the only thing."

"And what of me—don't I count in anywhere? I suppose not! God Almighty made the man first, and he 's taken precious good care to keep his place!"

"Be quiet!" he said, holding her by the arm. "The first time I met you you made me weak by scoffing; you shall not weaken me again—in spite of you I will do what I will do. I am wearier than death of this baffling. Whether I live after this work or no, it shall be done!"

His voice was low, his face tense; the fingers that closed upon her arm did not hurt her, but they closed firmly. There was a tumult in the dark face that bent to meet the fair one. His breath came against her face, and a quick heat stirred her blood.

"Marvel," he said huskily, "I 'm under the greatest obligation to you; you and your beauty have done more for me than I can ever put into words—there is n't anything could repay you. The sight of you as you stood at this door means—Lord! girl, I can't tell you what it means! It has given me almost all I want."

His voice shook, his eyes caressed her; he held out a trembling hand. But she had seated herself again, and gazed abstractedly into the fire, her hands folded upon her knee, her little bare feet planted in front of her. She looked composed; in reality her heart was thumping under her red bodice. What more would he ask?

His eagerness increased. "I have conceived a picture of you fighting through the storm, with wind-torn garments rent from your limbs. I should call it '*A Spirit of Storm.*' Will you be my model?" He was pale with emotion. All his heaven seemed to hang upon her answer, and she sat immovable. Was it the firelight or the red blood that dyed face and neck? He went on eagerly, standing near her:

"There are difficulties in your mind, naturally. Dear girl, I want to smooth them away. You have been very generous; have placed your trust in me almost without reserve. Have I sinned against it? Nay, I have reverenced you. The true artist is a being with a complex nature; he has an æsthetical appreciation and judgment of what is a necessity to his art; an approbation of beauty, and pleasure in it quite apart from the accident of personal character——"

She interrupted him with a queer little hysterical cry, half laugh, half moan.

"That face of yours," he blundered on, "those perfect hands and feet, are not personal to me, but are the medium of imagination; I regard them, as I have said,

with the artist's reverence and you with deepest gratitude. Can you bestow more?"

Marvel had been tortured and angered in the past by his indifference: the eyes that glanced past her, the impersonal tones. She felt the torture of this almost beyond endurance. She shook off his hand.

"Why should I?"

"There is no why," he declared, "except to enrapture that æsthetical sense of the thousands who would owe you so much. As for me, I am your lifelong debtor already. But there will be a way to show you how I appreciate. Marvel," the man's rich voice went on, "it is not possible to owe so much and not repay. All the coming years would be weighted——"

"Oh, you 've discovered *that?*" she interrupted with a short laugh; "and yet you want to increase the load."

He gave an impatient exclamation, and strode to the other end of the hut. A step or so did it; the distance was not far enough to work off his spleen. He came back again and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking down at her, puzzled what next to say. Her forlornness tugged at him. "Good Lord!" he thought, "go and reap all the fruit and leave her unhelped, to tug up hills of difficulty, as she had tugged up M'Kinnon's Pass? Not to be heard of!"

"Poor little woman!" he said suddenly, laying his hand gently on her hair. "I wish you 'd let me be

your friend. It 's a difficult sort of world for a girl like you to fight single-handed. You 're too young, and beautiful, and proud."

He knelt to mend the fire. It had burned to a glow, and left them in twilight, and in some unexplained way the shadowy figure of the girl worried him ; the strong resolute outlines opposed the new influence that possessed him concerning her. He wished the woman who had ministered to his art to be a happy woman. He would like to give her her heart's desire as she was granting his. What was her heart's desire ? To see the civilised world ? How easy that would be ! His mind was in the dark concerning her, and his instinct was to see her with physical eyes ; he placed twigs across and across. The wood crackled and caught, blazed up and revealed her, shining upon her hair and into her eyes, revealing every curve of bust and limb, her shapely ankles and feet.

A few hours ago she had but made the background of his thought, but her personal presence with its magnetic force had made itself felt. He tried to look into the averted eyes that seemed intent upon the twigs.

" Poor little feet ! " he said, by and by, laying his hand upon them.

The big eyes lifted slowly and looked at him quietly. He removed his hand and stood up.

" Woe 's me ! " he sighed, " for one unworthy to help you ! Am I never to repay ? "

"You asked, and I gave," she said, with simple grandeur of manner. "There was nothing more!"

"How you must dislike me!"

"Do I?" The brown eyes were uplifted again. Their expression hurt him.

"You must!" he affirmed, "for you will remember that you once said to me that if you hated anyone you would put him under an obligation."

"I tried to spare you!"

"Indeed you did!" he ejaculated with a short laugh. "Do you know that I 've never done so much suing in all my life before. I 've always had you to woo——"

She turned such a dimpling, smiling face towards him that he forgot to finish his sentence in the enchantment of it. He made a half-involuntary movement forward, then turned abruptly.

"It 's time for supper. I give you fair notice," he added, talking hurriedly and at random, "that if we can't get out of this to-morrow I shall strike; I 'll be *chef* to-night and be your obedient servant, but after a good night's rest I shall assume the prerogative of a lord of the creation, and give my commands."

"You 'll never order me about," she declared lightly, springing with relief to his change of mood.

"No?" he demanded, suspending operations on a tongue with a tin-opener, throwing her a challenging glance over his shoulder.

"Never!" she affirmed.

He bumped the tin and the tongue came out neatly. Arranging it precisely in the middle of the metal plate that did service as a dish, then wiping his fingers, he went the step or so back to her. She had risen, and folded her arms lightly, one foot planted in front of the other, her loosened hair falling below her waist. She was half smiling, half defiant, wholly in earnest. He was dismayed to find how strong an impulse came to take her in his arms and kiss the rebellion from her lips. Surprised, she saw the colour mount to his brow, and then leave him pale.

"Why do you always fight me?" he asked her presently; "why have you never liked me?"

"Why?" she echoed in a strained, almost fierce voice, clasping her hands behind her, her eyes nearly on a level with his own. "Perhaps I'm jealous; you've got so much, you see, and I only wanted to be of gentle blood. Till you came, and showed me the difference, I was not unhappy, although I was not content,"—her lips quivered, her voice broke in a pathetic note,—"but now I hate the very thought of that world of gifts and talents. Why should n't I have had my share?" Her voice had gained firmness, her eyes clearness.

"Dear girl," he answered, puzzled at this new view of her which she presented, "you are a queen! If you knew as much of the world as I do you would despise it."

"You don't despise it."

It was true, he did not.

"If you did," she resumed, "you would n't think so much of its opinion. I know you 're a great man, but you 're selfish for all that. The wind is a great power, but it 's cruel: it breaks and bends and sweeps away in an hour what it 's taken years to grow. And it seems to me that genius can be like that."

"Am I arrogant?" he interrupted.

She faced him fearlessly. "If arrogant is to assume rights that are none of yours, you 're arrogant enough. All that 's in the heavens above and on the earth beneath does n't seem too much for you to ask; the sun and stars were made for your art; you take friendship"—she gulped down the word "love,"—"smiles, beauty, all in your day's work, seeing nothing in itself and for itself, but always something beyond it, or it may be beneath it!"

"Not beneath it!" he exclaimed hotly. "My God! I am no panderer to the mob, no base tickler of a vulgar taste. I have never given myself up—given my art to coarseness. If I myself am selfish—say what you will of me, personally I may deserve your scorn! If I have claimed as my right all that the Creator made, it *is* my right, my right and yours, the right of any man, the privilege, if he have the spark of the poet within him, to refuse the common, to reach for the ideal, to discover grandeur, and to indicate it!"

He felt, while the hot words broke from him, that she did not fully understand him, and she, looking at him, flushed, transformed, feeling the thrill of his emotion, yet not in touch with its source, realised the difference between them, that her desires were vain and his were vast. She felt bitter and beaten because she was not a lady, did not stand upon his social pedestal ; but whoever his father and mother might have been he would have been himself ; the supernal fire that burnt within him was like the bush which the angry Moses saw—its flame was in itself and it could not be consumed.

With a dramatic gesture, as though to put him from her, she put out two protesting hands, and seated herself at the table of logs. He watched her mechanically as she touched up the rough board with deft movements, humbled by her disapprobation. Her strong nature had force, she had brought him down again from exaltation ; made his genius seem but a common necessary vent for personal gratification ; an obligation imposed upon his will by his own disposition. What were imagination and work after all but an expression of self ?

After a pretence of eating, they turned again to the fire.

" I 've made you miserable," she said contritely, putting her hand upon his shoulder. He bent his lips and kissed it without passion. " Don't mind me—I 've

got a horrid temper, and the sight of you aggravates me sometimes. Don't be vexed."

"Of course not, girl. But I wonder why I worry you?"

She turned away and stood before the fire. He looked as though he wanted to know.

"You ask a girl to set aside decency, and wonder why you worry her!" she said in a dull tone. "My manners are bad, perhaps, but I know what 's seemly, and I 'm dear enough to myself to see that the model of your picture would n't be placed to advantage in the opinion of the world whether we get out of this or not. If we do get out, I 've got my way to make, and according to your own showing it won't be over roses. If we do not get out, there are one or two who would care, and they must n't be hurt. Either way, I 'm too proud to need any explanation." She lifted her eyes and looked at him. "You 've said a deal one way and another about inspiration, and fine feelings, and grandeur. Come now, Wynn Winter, I have given you your side; don't you think there 's something to be said for the fine feelings of a girl, something grand in her modesty, something inspiring as the untrodden snow?"

Her attitude and gestures enforced her words; she had risen, and her haunting eyes pleaded for her woman's birthright. She was so downright she made platitudes awkward.

"We 've done a bit of Bible quoting, you and I,

since first we met," she proceeded, "though neither of us is religious, and to-night you 've been like the Tempter to me, who showed me all the things that ever I wanted—except one—why I should cast myself down. I 'll never do it, never — except — " "For your love," she had all but said. She moved hastily to the door : the wind blew gustily, a white drift half blocked the space, and great wails came from deep ravines.

" I 'd rather be out there ! " she said, and turned her white face to his. He drew her in and closed the door. " But as neither of us can get away, where shall I sleep ? "

" In the bunk," he answered, " and I 'll curl up here before the fire."

Action was a relief. He instinctively sprang to serve her. She might have been a duchess in that way she had of compelling service. He was busy quite a long time shaking up the fern bed and improvising a pillow. The lion of more than one London season was desperately anxious to make a soft nest for this child of Nature. Divested of affectation how simple we are at heart ! How much stronger Mother Nature holds us than educated refinement !

He curtained the bunk off with a blanket and piece of stout string.

" There ! " he said when it was done.

She held out her hand. " Good-night ! "

" Good-night ! " He pressed it reassuringly, held

it for a moment, then let it go. She slipped behind her curtain.

"Watchman, what of the night?" she heard him say, and she knew by the swaying of the blanket that he had opened the door and gone out.

In a few moments Wynn was covered with snow.

"*Here 's a pretty mess,*" he sang from his favourite *Mikado*, putting a good deal of meaning into the line. He looked right and left as he wandered off a few paces, but he could see nothing except the shining window of the hut.

"If it had not been for you I should have been lost!" he heard Marvel's voice say. He stamped about and hummed again.

"*Here 's a state of things. To her life she clings!*" then summing up the whole matter, he concluded emphatically: "*Here 's a pretty state of things. A pretty state of things!*"

When he re-entered the hut, he trod softly as though on holy ground. He put his great-coat near the fire to dry, then spreading a rug upon the hearth, lay down before the glowing logs. His keen eyes were wistful, they saw pictures in the fire: a vast city with glittering domes and spires; a crowd of people; a girl with hooded cloak wandering forlornly; a mountain pass, a solitary figure climbing. He covered his eyes with his arm.

It was an hour of extreme depression, an hour of re-

bound—all workers know it—when the thing dreamed of, toiled and sacrificed for, seems suddenly worthless and out of reach. The sensitiveness of the artistic nature had been chilled by Marvel's adverse criticism. She had found him on a mountain-top of inspiration and hurled him down.

A deep breath caught his ear, half sigh, half sob. He raised himself upon his elbow and listened. Another breath and another.

"Asleep!" he whispered, and half smiled.

Poor child! How alone she was! A woman Ishmael—her hand was against every man and every man's hand was against her! Wayward, strong, ingenuous, sweet, how would the world treat her?

She stirred and sighed. Her movement drew him, he listened with bated breath. The little cabin was full of the feel of her, like a sweet perfume.

"So—tired!" he heard her say, and drew his rug over his ears like a gentleman. He felt like listening at a keyhole.

Poor girl, she'd often be tired before she got through, he thought. The world for such as she would n't be all down and roses. Why would she not marry Tony and escape dire straits?

"Wynn!" said the sleeping girl. He uncovered his head and sat up. Marry Tony! Good heavens, no! She was too splendid, superb in her way. A year or so abroad and what a sensation she would make in

society ! He believed she would like it. He stood up and shook himself, then listened. Her breath came at regular intervals, and then she murmured :

" I shall be warm under the snow ! "

The voice was toneless, like a sleep-talker's : it made Wynn shudder. He listened for a long time without pretence—he wanted to hear. But only long-drawn breaths. Warm under the snow ? Well, possibly they would be there together. There were only provisions for a week. Dear little chum ! they were likely to put in a rough time together. And what of his ambitious dreams ? The girl was right—the Almighty had been before them and would be after. He found himself straining his ears for her slightest movement ; her regular breathing was the only sound. How long he listened he never knew. At last, he moved softly to the curtain and lifted it. She lay with one white arm thrown over her head ; her hair made bright confusion on the pillow ; the sad, sweet mouth was partly open, the rounded throat bare ; one little white foot was thrust from the rough blue blanket.

He stood for a long time, then became conscious that he was sinning against her trust. He let the curtain fall, and lay down on his blanket again ; and in the heart of the glowing logs he saw his picture once more —the great troubled eyes, their defiance and appeal ; the splendid limbs straining up the steep. It would win his world and lose hers ; but why not make their

world one? Why not marry her? Why not share with her so? He started up alert. The thought in its newness startled him. She was not of gentle birth; true, but she was herself. Her defence of her maiden modesty had stirred and pleased him—she rang true. But he did not love her, not as he had dreamed one day of loving. That one first, last, and divinest miracle of two souls made one had never yet been wrought for him. His look became dreamy as though he gazed upon a vision. Rousing with a sigh he asked another question, Would Marvel marry him? He pondered it for long, and then her voice called again.

"Wynn!"

"It is Fate," he said; and, rising, lifted the curtain. She still slept; and as he gazed his heart warmed and his pulses quickened. She seemed to him most beautiful; he tried to spread the wings of his will and fly free, but he was weary of combat. The highest appeared, disappeared—there is the whole history of a life. The best seemed illusion; he would not look at it.

"Marvel," he whispered, "waken." And she awoke, her starved heart fed by what she saw in his face.

"Your world is narrow and sad, dear," he said, kneeling beside her, and taking her warm hands in his. "Will you let me try to broaden and cheer it? I need you, girl—will you marry me?"

His words fell like day-dawn on the frozen earth;

and yet, with her hands clasped about his neck, she held him off and asked him " Why ? "

" Because your beauty must be mine by right. Trust me, I will match one generosity by another. Give me yourself, and I 'll go shares with you, dear, in all I have. My wife will never find a rough world. And I 'll try "—he almost said " to come down to you," but caught the words before they slipped—" to meet your desires. Do you think that I can make you happy ? Let me try ! "

" It is all a dream ! " she half whispered.

" It is not all a dream," he said in a low tone ; " it 's true enough that you and I are here, true enough that we may die together. But if we go down to earth again, child, it must be as my wife ! "

" Why ? " she asked again, both her hands clasped at the back of his neck, half holding him off, half drawing him. Her eyes were fastened on his, her breath came pantingly. His head fell on her neck.

" Because I love you," he whispered.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE VALLEY

THE red lamp burned in the kitchen window of Beach Cottage and carried far into the outer darkness; the waning moon had not yet risen, and the shadow of mountain and bush lay deep. Along the shore the wavelets fell with a half-moan that sank into a sigh. Manapouri sorrowed. The storm had stirred its heart, and like a woman who had ceased sobbing, its bosom heaved.

Under the faint light of stars a boat skimmed over the dark surface of the water, a man and a woman rowing. The woman's neck was turned, her eyes were on the light; the man neither looked at the light nor at her, but straight ahead into the gloom. A little cry aroused him. Marvel was saying something incoherently, which he did not understand, or try to understand. It had interested him to watch her all this home-coming. This last day she had scarce been able to restrain her impatience. He bent forward and

strained his eyes to get a sight of her. He decided that she was looking tremulous but happy; and that she was not thinking of him at all.

"Oh! I am so glad!" she burst out, "so glad! The light is in the window, and it is because of us. She is still alive or it would not be there: it is her custom to have it burning when one is absent." She could not take her eyes off it. "Pull for the steps, Wynn; we will go in that way, the tide is high." Then as they passed into the light he noticed the expression that passed over her face was half startled, half shrinking: she breathed hard. "There is no one to be seen. Has Max forbidden my father to stay? Has mother found him out? *What* has happened?"

The past returned to her with its obligations. For the last two weeks it had played small part in her consciousness; she had been as one who had staked all for one intense desire, and won. She had impetuously dashed herself against the order of her little world, broken its laws, sinned against its prejudices, doomed its hopes. But she had drunk of the waters for which she had been athirst—and its Lethe had blotted out all memory of pain. She had had no regret, no sense of shame—she was not small enough to count her self-spending, her self-surrender.

And Wynn had been touched by the woman who fell to the common lot in an uncommon way. He had made shipwreck of his highest, but, thank God, not to

be nauseated ! But she had known the best of passion —there was sanctification to her in their fused lives. All that was most beautiful in her life had been hers while they waited for death together, and her gestures, her smiles, the new subdued dignity of manner and speech delighted him. He had lingered on it unconsciously all the homeward journey ; although there was a stubborn denial of happiness in his mind, he was glad that he had not degraded her. He was quite clear on that point : through the half-formed nightmare of his day-dreams her happiness was the one ray. His heart would have broken at any cry, any protest, from her. Further than that he would not let his mind go. He had sacrificed the man to the artist, he dared not leave the artist now and be the man. He had gained the artist's joy, must he pay the man's sorrow ? He had lost his trick of boyish light-heartedness. True, he had spent himself upon his picture—and his whole heart rose up in pride and thankfulness—and could a man gain two worlds at once ? No man could fairly serve two masters, and he had only asked of himself what he had asked of others—renunciation. But while they lived side by side together would his want feed on her joy ?

Would she live to wish she could take back what she had given ? She was still so strange to him he could never gauge what she would do or think, never calculate what she or he would say till he heard their voices

speaking together. It was frightfully clear to him how far apart they were ; and what made it more difficult, while she had lived, and fed her soul, a new sense had been waking in him that had lain dormant all his life, which his passion for art had starved—he became conscious that he was mateless—and that it was not good for man to be alone. But he would make Marvel his wife : he had told himself with desperate faith that this was the only right. If intense denial of self must be made, he would make it.

Marvel did not notice his look as they stood on the steps together ; she had grown to trust to his tenderness. She turned and covered her face. A rush of old recollections made a tumult in her heart, the old environment began to tell. Her knees trembled with excitement ; she realised what this would mean for Max and his mother, she winced with the old shame at thought of her father. Wynn put his arm about her ; he saw her sudden fear, but misjudged its cause.

" I will make up," he whispered.

" It is not me," she said softly, with trembling lip. " I shall torture him—and her, that I cannot make Max happy—but it is not in my destiny."

She leaned upon him for a moment, then dragged herself into the kitchen, Wynn following her, at a loss for her meaning.

The room was in perfect neatness and order ; all the household utensils in shining array in their accustomed

places, the logs glowing on the hearth. There was a little taste of bitterness in the thought that her place had been so well filled, but a sensation of relief crossed it that the dying woman had been well tended. The cottage was silent, no one was to be seen, yet that electrical feeling of life pervaded it that assured them both they were not there alone.

The tears had gathered in Marvel's eyes. Wynn watched her, as in a few seconds' time she glanced from one object to another, reading facts from objects, where he was at sea. "My place is here!" was written plainly on her countenance, in that quick moment of the half-formulated thought. A sound came from Mary Meredith's room, the sound of long-drawn sobbing breath. It strained the chest to hear it, and Wynn felt a spasmodic inclination to breathe for that unseen breather. Marvel made him an agitated motion to stay where he was, and slipped along the passage out of sight. Before any freedom of action came to him in this unrehearsed scene into which he seemed to have strayed in a dream, so unreal was it, so outside anything concerning himself, the tension of that painful listening was broken by a voice that set the air vibrating with melody :

"Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on ;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Suddenly Wynn awoke. Weariness and languid interest were quickened to life—the scene was transformed from boredom to definite interest. The wonderful young voice rose and fell, now tremulous with emotion, now clear as a bird singing in the sky. Of theology the man had no organised knowledge; the restless energy of his mind had spent itself in other paths. His religion, his creed, was Beauty, and because he had sinned against his highest conception of it his face had sharpened, his eyes dulled. But, until he heard that voice, he was not conscious how large a growth was that individual germ in him, which was a thing apart from his reputation—his genius—something irreconcilable to consideration and conduct. Nor did the words of the sacred song suggest religion—it was the vital force of soul with which they were infused that reached and touched him; smote him with a poignant sense of something missed; drew and held him.

He had followed the sound before the first verse was ended, in time to see Marvel slip through a door. Without weighing his action—he never thought of it, or his sentiments or sensations, or any violations—he obeyed the call from his self-death. And at the threshold of Mary Meredith's room he was arrested by what he saw—his physical vision being by far his most de-

veloped sense: a tall, white-habited woman bending over a bed, with a head like Clytie's, the rippling fair hair waving from the low brow, and plaited in rich coils at the back; closely braided so that the outline of the head was not destroyed. In the half-light, the rich cream-white tint of the smooth cheeks and neck was brought out. The young face was unlined, but the shadow upon it did not touch the eyes, that had the blue-black lustre of stars. Her gown fell in soft folds about her slender but rounded form as she half bent to support the dying woman, who leaned against the propped-up pillows, her eyes glittering and half glazed, gazing too far off to see the girl who entered abruptly in travel-stained dress and shoes, and scarlet cloak that fell from her bronze hair.

Grim death was mocked by the contact with such rich, glowing life; as, with a smothered cry, Marvel sank to her knees and clasped the rigid fingers that lay on the white coverlet a tremor passed over the dying body as if from contact with a battery. The possibilities of the scene were not lost to Wynn: loose-lipped sensuality sitting abashed in the form of Frank Meredith, the bold eyes—that could not bear to watch the spirit freeing itself from its clay—veiled, the shamed head bowed; strength and self-repression in the tense furrowed face of Max, who with folded arms stood at the foot of the bed, and only glanced from his mother to Marvel. But in that brief glance, with its quick

and passionate relief, thankfulness, tenderness, and the sudden flushing of the stern face, the heaving of the broad chest, Wynn with a contraction of the heart read the truth. For the first time. "As God is my witness!" his eyes tried to tell Max as they met. But Max saw nothing, and sent him such a grateful message for his care of Marvel that his face paled.

But Cordelia wrested them from earth-passion again; stole into their hearts and soothed.

> "I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
> Shouldst lead me on;
> I loved to choose and see my path; but now
> Lead Thou me on.
> I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
> Pride ruled my will: remember not past years."

The exquisite voice had pierced the dying woman's unconsciousness. Her eyes cleared; met those of Max in a tender farewell, then feeling the kisses on her hand looked slowly round and down, and gradually, as she realised that the wanderer had returned, as though her patient spirit had known and waited, the smile deepened and spread, loosening the set, cold lips. She pressed the warm hands that folded about her own, then with a sigh of content closed her eyes. Her lips parted again.

"*Remember not past years!*" she murmured, and died.

Wynn walked slowly towards his studio, and for once

he did not notice the blue-black splendour of the star-spangled sky, or the surface of the river. His mood of uplifting passed, and a dead melancholy weariness dragged his steps. Reaching his studio, he lit his reading lamp and sank into a lounge-chair. The familiar surroundings rested him unconsciously; put him in touch again with his old world. His hands lay inert on the arms of his chair, he was deadly pale, and a nervous quivering of the eyelids and nostrils told that the strain of the past few weeks had been too much for him. The domestic tragedy he had just witnessed had unnerved him. Never a man of broad sympathies, more hermit than Bohemian, by inclination he had shunned real intimacy, although enjoying those associations of distinction which repute had enforced. He had sauntered through society honourably and with a good conscience; vice offended his fastidious taste. He had sauntered to the world's end—cut himself off from all distraction, and found himself harried and disturbed by a stress of feeling.

"*Remember not past years.*" He stood up and shook himself like a great dog after a plunge into cold water, then crossing to a cupboard, opened a bottle of wine and drank a deep draught.

"Now to the inn and for a feed and a sleep," he said half aloud. Turning, his eyes fell upon the sketch of Marvel that had attracted him before, where she had turned, as though dejectedly, to go. His eyes had

none of their old quizzical expression as he gazed; they were sad and tender. "No, I will not hurt you," he said; "when I have the heart to think of it at all I shall always be glad that I have only hurt myself."

CHAPTER XIV

OUT OF THE COMMON RUT

ANTHONY ALGERNON ARMSTRONG stood tiptoe, with his mouth screwed to the dimensions of a button, listening to Marvel. They were standing at one end of the studio in the half-twilight of the afternoon. A fire was burning brightly between the dogs, gleaming in patches upon various objects in the apartment. The copper kettle singing on its stand over its spirit-lamp twinkled a reflected hearth; the teacups and silver service glinted here and there, and the statuettes and pictured faces were suddenly revealed by the blazing wood, disappearing into shadow again as the flame subsided. Near the great palm, at the working end of the studio, Wynn and Cordelia were absorbed in one another. On an easel near was one of the painter's landscapes, which they had been discussing.

Marvel had noticed on her first entrance that every sketch of herself had been removed from sight; a veiled canvas in a corner was her secret and Wynn's. She was grateful for the delicacy, but a feeling that she had

been deposed had thrust like a thorn through her softer sensation—a wish that Cordelia might know how completely she monopolised the artist's thought. Marvel glanced at the two involuntarily. Cordelia was saying something about the landscape, eyes smiling as well as lips.

Wynn, one delicate hand resting on the picture-frame, stood in an attitude of deferential attention, his eyes fastened on the face that in spite of its sweetness had yet a look of strenuous strength, almost of *hauteur*. The hardness and brightness that she knew so well had left the man's face, something intangible, something she could not name was transforming it. A spasm of pain clutched her heart—Cordelia must be told that she had vested rights. True, it was by her own desire that no one knew as yet. Mary Meredith had only been laid to rest an hour ago. She turned resolutely to Tony.

"Thanks are very weak," she said, offering her hand with a gentle courtesy and dignity that, although new in her manner, sat gracefully upon her. "I wish I knew some other word to say to you."

Tony knew another word, but meanwhile he was more than recompensed, holding her hand in one palm and patting it with another.

"If ever I can show my gratitude in any other way——"

She was thinking that as Wynn's wife it might be

possible. The brewer's heir would perhaps wish to keep an acquaintance, made at Manapouri, in a more important place. She withdrew her hand. The pats irritated her, and a sense of Wynn's ownership made the touch of another man distasteful. Tony put his hands behind his back out of temptation's way, and tilted himself to his heels. In spite of short stature and slender make, the pride which he felt in Marvel's approbation inflated him to quite gigantic proportions in his own estimation.

"Don't you twouble about me, Miss—" he hesitated, and almost inaudibly added, "Marvel."

His small eyes blinked up at her. But, if she heard, she made no sign. Her tone was equally gentle and warm as she proceeded :

"And those flowers to-day, they were so beautiful. How pleased my mother would have been had she known ! She had so few attentions ! "

Tony had had them brought—a whole trap-load of them—from Dunedin by special messenger, regardless of expense, and they made a scented snow on the lonely grave on the hillside. There was a veil before Marvel's eyes as she thought of it. She had shed no tears of false sentiment, it was only the thought of what the dead woman had missed that moved her now——

"——Not lost ! Not yesterday, to-day, nor any day ! Not pain, not waiting, nor disgrace. The great granary of life receives the output of the ages. All

thine and mine. And if to this inestimable store we add one grain we further enrich those that shall come after."

It was Cordelia's voice, a little raised ; its clear sweet tones vibrated through the studio. Marvel and Tony both turned, but the man and woman were too absorbed to notice it.

" I—er," stammered Tony, " Miss Gwey—w-would say—that she did know ! "

" Know what ? "

Marvel's manner and look were preoccupied. She appeared to be looking past Tony, through him to a vision not seen by the big sad eyes.

" About the flowers," he said softly, trying to comfort something he saw in her face and did not understand. There was an indescribable charm in her manner of late that made itself felt to Tony—the mystical charm that comes with knowledge. How had she changed ? Something she lacked that she had, but more was added than had been taken away. In her sombre black gown, with its soft white ruffles, she was more subdued to the eye. Her presence had always been a vivid patch of colour in the room, half barbaric, wholly picturesque. This new Marvel awed him a little.

" Miss Gwey is a wemarkable woman," proceeded Tony, bringing one hand from behind his back to stroke thoughtfully his sleek hair. " While you were

away she managed everybody. Max, who was—ah—er—vexed, don't you know—to—er—find a visitor, she quieted with a word. I—er—added another myself, Miss Marvel, and the thing was done! I assure you that Mr. Mewedith found himself amused!" Tony put both hands in his pockets and rattled his loose coins. "And a most, weally a most wemarkable thing was, she knew you were alive!" He went on tiptoeing again as his excitement increased. "And when it snowed, don't you know, and I—er—we could n't west for anxiety and dwead for you, she insisted that you were alive and well. 'But, my dear Miss Gwey, how can you possibly know?' I asked. 'Is it a miwacle that life touches life?' she asked. And when you come to think of it, it is n't. I will say that for her!" added the little man, as though Miss Grey needed some explaining, and had puzzled him infinitely. "And she pwoved to be twoo!" He blurted this out gratefully. "She's something quite out of the common wut."

He resumed after a contemplative pause: "A most intewesting expewience. There 's a lift about her, don't you *know;* she dwags all your thoughts and aspiwations out of you——"

Marvel glanced round again and lost the end of Tony's remark. Wynn was lighting the standard lamp, with a courteous bow of apology for disturbing her speech. His strong deft fingers moved lightly and noiselessly; he appeared to grudge the loss of a word.

The rose-light flooded the palm tree, and enveloped the tall, white, statuesque figure with a sunset flush, giving her colour and warmth that transformed her. Her dainty hands were clasped easily and hanging, her chin a little raised. Her uncommon beauty was startling. About Wynn, too, there was an expansion and glow, the haggard look of the past week had gone; his eyes were sparkling, the contradictions of the serene brow and pugnacious jaw were lost; power and frankness blended on the refined face.

"Genius is never cautious," Cordelia was saying; "it has the venturesomeness of creation, yet the restraint that finishes each blade of grass."

Marvel had lost the thread of what Tony was saying, and made random answers, not conscious that she spoke at all. Whenever this scene came back to her in after years, Tony glided into it, looking up to her with a flushed face, excitedly tipping from toe to heel, and from heel to toe. Her physical sight was photographing this upon her brain; her mental vision saw that first morning on the sun-flecked lake, when Wynn sat opposite in her boat and opened his mind to her. She had met him with rebuff, had had no words to answer. Words had rushed from his lips again, and this other woman was answering with strength and freedom.

The girl grew suddenly chill, and pressed her hands together. She was transported, in some strange way, back to that morning, long ago, when Frank Meredith

had deserted the woman who had given him all. She comprehended with a swift agonising comprehension. She also felt deserted.

"Mother!" she cried out above her breath.

Tony saw her shiver, and caught the word. "Come to the fire," he said, and led the way.

As she passed Wynn her impulse was to touch him with a tender hand, but the smile on his lips was not for her. She averted her eyes with almost timidity, and, standing on the hearth-rug, held out her hands to the blaze. Physically, she was overwrought. So much of hot tempestuous feeling had been crowded into the last few weeks that the demand on body and nerve had consumed much force. Alternate torture and ecstasy had done their work, and a numbness was creeping over her; like a burnt-out fire, passion, apprehension, anger, jealousy suddenly failed. The science and purpose of life had not been shown her; the absorbing necessities of human existence had been her only mentors, she was stumbling along in the dark—quick to grasp a fact, quick to act upon it. And that hapless fatalism, deep rooted in her impulsive nature, robbed her of hope. She had felt it all along, she told herself—from his first coming—that Cordelia could meet his mind and understand his need. For a very little while she had been the only one in his world.

"Yes," Tony's voice made itself heard, evidently taking up a broken thread, "I hope you will like my

place in Devon. I 'm glad you 're going to England——"

"Who told you?" demanded Marvel with a sharp note.

Tony looked petrified. "Why, you—just now!" he faltered. How strange she looked—she was going to be ill.

"It 's something out of the common wut, I assure you—Marvel. The grounds are hilly, don't you know, and the sea in sight, and the wed lanes all wound about it. An Englishman's cottage is his castle and a' that, to quote Burns. And I mean to impwove the condition of the people, westore fourfold from the brewery, and all that sort of thing, get wid of the taint of the beer, don't you know. And a beautiful woman's influence—I will say that for it—would lift—lift." He rose to the extreme tips of his toes as though he was straining up with the load of the world. "And I 'm glad you encouwage my ideas of Parliament," he concluded with a rush.

"I?"

"You were so good as to say you thought I 'd make a hit."

"I must be mad! Do excuse me," she went on drearily, passing her hand over her head. "I don't think I know quite what I mean; my head throbs. It 's a headache, I suppose, I 'm not sure—I never had one before; or perhaps I am going mad."

"Don't you twouble about that!" said Tony consolingly, drawing forward a low basket-chair, into which she sank. "Most people go mad, off and on, don't you know, and the p-people you 'd think the sanest are often the m-maddest; the most hopeless cases are those that don't know it. Most people call me a bit cwacked, but I 'm not so cwacked but I can see a thing or two. And I see you 're dead beat!"

"Oh, if only you would n't talk!" Marvel exclaimed with all her old petulance, "and not fuss! Do take that cushion away from my back, and sit down—do, Tony!"

Tony's mouth closed with a snap. He sat down dejectedly in a chair that took him in bodily, and with a hand on each knee stared at Marvel anxiously. In a moment or two he sprang up as though electrified. Tea, of course. Tea. What had she said that morning after her long night's vigil?—there was nothing when you were dead beat so delicious as tea. He glanced at the host interrogatively. Why, what a fool the man was! he 'd forgotten all about it. Well, let Wynn jabber, he 'd make it himself; and while he did so, Marvel climbed M'Kinnon's Pass, strained up and up through the cold snow. But as she went she distinctly heard Wynn and Cordelia talking. Wynn was saying:

"We hamper ourselves—we make environments, Miss Grey. Life first gushes pure and cool as water

from a mountain-side ; then it gets dammed, blocked between weeds and rocks, and swirls round in eddies, and there is an end to expression ! "

" But the very obstacles," answered the musical voice, " once they are overcome, give fresh force, fresh impetus. The living soul can't stagnate ; we move out and on to see, hear, feel, to know, to comprehend, and finally to realise. But this thou knowest, and I ask thy patience, yet not for myself but for the Quaker mother who yet lives in me ! " She laughed softly and gladly, and moved to the fire.

" Excuse me, old fellow, but Miss Mewedith is pwecious fagged, don't you know, and I 've made tea ! "

Wynn coloured hotly, and made blundering haste to redeem his reputation of host, snatching up one thing after another and handing them to his guests.

" I 'm awfully sorry—awfully. Marvel is of course faint." His eyes said, " Forgive me, dear." Tony had shamelessly poured out the first cup and carried it to Marvel. Wynn followed with bread and butter, and took the opportunity to whisper, " Eat, dear girl ! "

She lifted her mournful eyes and looked at him, not reproachfully, nor in anger, but like a dog who has fawned and been beaten. The look startled him. Where had he seen that expression before ? He remembered—in his first vision of his picture.

He was still aglow with the contact of Cordelia's large hope, and the tenderness of his mood made him gentle. He glanced once or twice at Marvel's face, but his eyes strayed off to that other face.

Cordelia sat in silence, but the moved expression had not yet left her features. It was so rare in these mountain solitudes to meet with one who understood. She shook off lethargy and crossed to Marvel.

"Sister," she said, with a sweetness in which there was no affectation, "as thou knowest, my father is awaiting me at the inn. We purposed crossing to-night, or, at latest, dawn, but if thou needest me——"

Marvel waved her away. "Go," she said brusquely.

"But thou art sorrowing, and if I can comfort thee——"

"You can't, you can't; I 'd rather be alone!"

Wynn looked from one to the other anxiously. His instinct was to apologise for Marvel; he felt responsible. By a mutual impulse Cordelia turned to him.

"She is weary!" she explained gently.

That fired Marvel's blood; that Cordelia should presume to account for her to Wynn! She stood up, the colour warming her pale cheeks. She looked from one to the other haughtily. For a breathless moment the fate of three hung in the balance, then her face quivered, haughtiness changed to dignity.

"Forgive me," she said quietly, holding out her hand to Cordelia. "I am your debtor—I shall not for-

get! Are you going? So will I. No, Tony. No, Wynn, don't come. I want to find Max."

"I also should like to see him."

"Not to-night," said Marvel, turning back at the doorway and looking at him meaningly. "He can't bear it to-night—it is his first night alone."

CHAPTER XV

"SO FULL OF FROST"

AS Marvel neared the cottage its lighted window gave evidence that it was occupied, and she hoped that Max had returned. Since his mother's death little had been seen of him. It occurred to the girl that he might suspect something, but if so he gave no hint, unless avoidance of Wynn might be taken as such. Then, again, it might not, for Max was "dour," and would not rush to speech in sorrow.

On entering the kitchen, Marvel was disappointed to find, not Max, but her father. She had seen little of him of late, and he had receded into the background of her thoughts. Tony had managed to amuse him at the inn. But his presence at this moment jarred on every strained nerve, offended every sense of decency and delicacy. She was humiliated, and sore enough, and this vulgar, coarse personality, after whose image she had been made, however idealised, was offensive to her, and seemed to push her into the mire. His mourning suit of broadcloth in its shining newness

seemed to reflect its wearer's smirk, which, as his daughter's scornful glance fell upon him, changed to an expression of hypocritical mournfulness.

An impulse of loathing and disgust swept over the girl.

"You!" she said, seating herself at the spotless deal table, and leaning her arms upon it, her eyes fixed upon Frank Meredith in a manner that irritated him. "You 'd best not loiter about here; if you take my advice you 'll clear off before Max has it out with you."

"Thank you, my dear," he answered with a sneer, "I 'll take something besides your advice. I hope you have n't forgotten our little arrangement, and by God! I 've earned it. What with that psalm-singing fool the mad artist's daughter, and—well, let the dead lie!"

"You 'd best," said Marvel quietly, her eyes still on him, while her hand fumbled in the bosom of her dress.

He watched her stealthily. She drew out a roll of notes. He made a movement of eagerness. She put her hands over them and spread them out on the table.

"Two hundred pounds, as you see. Max gave them to me this morning. They were in a packet addressed 'To Marvel, with Mary Meredith's blessing.' Poor thing! how many nights of weariness and days of work they represent! She knew how to be hard on herself —her generosity throve on unkindness. I hope she

does n't know that you 've robbed her again, that her last peace was paid for by the stint of so many years."

"Stow that!" said Frank Meredith coarsely. "Good God, I 've earned the money!" and he shuddered.

"The blessing is for me," proceeded Marvel, in the same curious voice, looking at the envelope out of which she had taken the notes—"To Marvel, with Mary Meredith's blessing!"

"You 're welcome to it," he sneered; "blessings are not in my line!"

"So I should suppose," she answered, looking up at him with bitter, burning scorn. "I expect you 've been cursed the oftenest."

He laughed uneasily. In spite of his exasperation, she interested him; she was the only member of her sex with whom he had had intimate relations who neither feared nor loved him.

"There 's nothing in blessing or cursing—mere words," he mumbled.

"Is n't there? Some people think there is. Cordelia Grey believes every word tells, good or ill; that it has a power only less potent than an act."

"Look here," he interrupted. "I can't stand this sort of thing much longer. Give me the money and let me clear out before that surly brute comes in."

"Meaning Max?"

"Meaning Max!"

"I wonder if you ever get a glimpse of yourself as others see you—as I see you, for instance?" she asked, the look in her eyes not pleasing him with its hint of storm.

"I 'll lay I don't," he said resentfully. "Give us an idea of the picture—rub the colour in!"

This indirect allusion to an artist brought Wynn before the girl's eyes, with his scrupulous daintiness and refinement; emphasised the division between them. She turned sick with loathing; the calm of her face broke up. She drew her eyebrows together and stared at him like an animal before it springs.

"You are tainted, you are one of those men whose presence is enough to make the place unholy. I don't know what you were in the days gone by; you must have been something different, for two good women have cared for you. But I—I loathe you. I feel as though I was avenging a wrong not my own—to the tips of my fingers I tingle to hurt you. Go, oh go! But before you go I *must* know something about my mother."

She had risen, and was pacing to and fro, throwing him looks of scorn, which left him helpless with amazement. His face flushed angrily, the pupils of his eyes expanded ominously. He threw a sentence at her brutally, for his impulse was to strike.

"Your mother was never married!"

She wheeled round sharply as to face one who had

given her a cowardly blow in the back. She swayed a little.

"Take care," she said hoarsely, "be careful what you say."

"I never married your mother!" he repeated doggedly, reconstructing the sentence to remove the blame from the woman to himself. He made a movement forward, he thought Marvel was going to fall; but with an imperious gesture she waved him off, and he fell back a step. She did not cry out or rave, her splendid height seemed to diminish; she visibly shrank, every vestige of colour left her face and lips.

"You would have it," he grumbled, sorrier than he had ever been in his life, with an impotent wish that he could go back and save the possibility of this hour; "you 'd rile the temper of a saint! I never meant to tell you; no one knows except ourselves, not another soul; and unless you 're fool enough to blab, no one ever will know. It 's nobody's business that I can see—the world at large is none so virtuous—' what the eye does n't see,' you know! There 's too much damned cant abroad. Within the law, any little affair of parentage is a mere incident——"

"But outside the law—" she interrupted, not lifting her eyes, and cowering still. "We 'll keep to facts, please, that concern us. I 'm outside the law, I 'm a nobody!"

A dead silence fell upon the room. The log, where

it had burned through, seemed to thud heavily as it settled on the hearth; the autumn wind moaned, it seemed to the shamed man, like women crying; the vines upon the window tapped softly with ghostly fingers. He glanced half fearfully over his shoulder. The scattered bank-notes lay upon the table unheeded. He wished that the girl would look up or speak. If only he could have foreseen, it would have been so easily averted. He pulled at his moustache and stared at her. She had always been a bright-eyed kiddie worth marrying for—if he had only known.

"It 's rough on me!" she said at last, looking at him.

He shuffled from one foot to the other, and cleared his throat. Her beauty had suffered wreck in those moments of silence. She was haggard and old. He tried to recover his self-possession, and made to lay his hand upon her shoulder consolingly. Her eyes deterred him. She drew herself up rigidly.

"If you 're going to harass yourself to death about it—more fool you! What 's done can't be undone. I 'd undo if I could. You 'll spoil your looks and ruin your chances, and fine chances you 've got if you know how to play your cards well. There 's that painter fellow—strike the iron while it 's hot; you must have made an impression during that romantic incident of the snow-storm." He watched her closely while he

spoke, but her face was inscrutable. "Or Tony—he 's an ass certainly, but he 's got a pot of money."

She drew herself up with the haughtiness of a queen —repulsion, condemnation in her face; but she would not deign one word of comment.

"Will you please tell me about my mother?" she asked coldly.

"She was an Australian," he answered sullenly. "Her father was vicar of one of the Sydney churches —a pompous, self-righteous old hypocrite, who calculated he and his family were entitled to free passes to the front stalls in Paradise. Mind, I loved your mother. Alice was the only woman I ever cared a toss for—a sweet little thing she was, pretty, too, and gentle as a lamb. If it had n't been for the parson we should have been married. Sounds paradoxical, does n't it? But I was n't good enough for him." He hesitated, his eyes fell, he flushed, then paled, the ghost of pathos came into his husky voice. "I was an ex-convict's son!"

The two stood facing each other, he betraying what that had once meant. She moved her lips, and the knuckles of her clasped hands showed white with the strain she put upon them.

"Did you speak?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"My father," he resumed, "was the son of a Scotch physician practising in London—a man of repute;

my father was his only son, studying for the same profession, strong-willed, impulsive, hot-tempered, and generous. You're very like him. The old Meredith had great hopes of him, but he got in with a fast set at college, and at his trial pleaded guilty to forgery!"

Marvel's face quivered. She opened and clasped her hands again; that was the only sign she made.

"He owned his sin and paid the price," continued the man with savage energy. "Chained to felons in one of those brutal convict ships where, among other diabolical tortures, the starving wretches were placed so that they might smell the meat prepared for their jailers, he suffered degrading misery. He served his time, and was free. Free! Free as a man is with a broken heart and disgraced name. Free to pick up the broken pieces of his life and make what he could of them. He did n't make much, for he had n't a golden cement. It is only the crime that can be gilded with a wash of gold that is ever hidden from the public sight——"

Big burning tears welled into Marvel's eyes, and, rolling down her cheeks, dropped upon her hands. Frank Meredith saw them, and turned to pace the room, an added bitterness in his voice.

"He married a servant-girl—who else could he marry? No gentlewoman could mate with him. And the servant-girl was good to him, thank God! I was

only a kid when he died, but I was awfully fond of the bent, quiet, grey-headed man. The servant-girl went after him soon. Perhaps she did n't trust the Almighty with him in some other world, and wanted to ' do ' for him as before. And I was left to shift for myself. And devilish rough work it was. The gilded ones would n't tolerate whitewash anyhow. I 've been Jack-of-all-trades in my time—compositor, newspaper correspondent, miner ; and as miner I struck gold. Then I went back to Sydney and met Alice, and, by the Lord above, I should have been right, if it had n't been for that parson! His mission was to save souls collectively and send 'em to perdition individually. His daughter should never marry a convict's son—the sins of the fathers, you know——"

" And you handed on the curse," cried the girl. " O base, O cruel ! "

Her cry startled him, and broke into the savage revenge of his triumph. He was checked, his hoarse tones faltered.

" I took her away. I brought down his proud head into the dust. I, the ex-convict's son, taught him what his religion had failed to teach—that mercy is twice blessed."

" Mother, O mother ! " cried Marvel, leaning her head on her folded arms upon the mantel-shelf, " it was your tears that I used to feel falling on my face ! "

" It brought him down from his pulpit," the man

went on, "and he lived to implore me in the name of God to marry his daughter."

Marvel turned her tear-stained face to him.

"A man that can strike his enemy through an innocent woman is a cur. Your father was a gentleman, although he sinned. He paid his debt honourably. There are large sins and small ones—yours was paltry, small, spiteful: it savours of the kitchen-maid. You dragged down again what your father tried to rebuild. If you had been like him the shame would have been wiped away by now; as it is, your daughter is a castaway. Here," she added, moving to the table and gathering up the notes that lay there, "take this and go, and remember that I have given you all I have——"

Heavy, dragging footsteps sounded on the steps. The door opened, and Max stood in the room.

He glanced from Marvel, standing with the banknotes in her outstretched hand, her face disturbed, her cheeks stained with tears, to her father, not less disturbed than she. One step divided the pair; the glance took in the situation. Max wore his mountaineering garb of thick grey tweed, with woollen stockings meeting the knickerbockers at the knee. No badge or sign of mourning drew notice to his loss, the sensitive mouth alone did that. His heavy brows hung over eyes not less clear and far-seeing than usual.

"Go!" he said laconically, pointing to the door.

Frank Meredith had not had time to recover himself. At a distance he could make light of the eccentricities of his step-son, at close quarters he felt easier near an open door. At the present moment Max barred the exit, and he wanted the notes. No inspiration came to him; his eyelids quivered nervously as his glance travelled slowly over the outline of the gigantic frame and massive head. Anywhere else he would have admired his style.

Marvel looked at Max and saw every muscle was strained with the self-control he put upon himself not to take her father by the collar and fling him into the lake. Her own manner she forced to calm.

"He is going this moment," she stammered. "I was saying farewell. Take this," she added, turning to Frank Meredith imploringly, and holding out the notes again, "and go quickly; I am *so* tired—do go."

Max heard the break in her voice and turned to her quickly. Gently but firmly he possessed himself of the money, and drew the girl within the shelter of his arm.

"You hear," he said, "go quickly."

Frank Meredith saw that he was worsted, that he might as well temporise with and endeavour to persuade one of the mountains outside as try to move this young man, whom as a boy he had insulted and mocked for a clown. Concentrated hate blazed at him out of the deep-set eyes, and one of the most ignominious moments of his life was that which he took to pass

the man whose arm encircled his daughter protectingly. Hot insulting words sprang to his lips, but he choked them back. At the door he turned, but whatever he might have said Marvel arrested. She broke from Max and laid a detaining hand upon his arm.

"My mother—have you a picture of her?" she asked breathlessly.

The man hesitated for a moment sullenly, then, fumbling in his pocket, he drew out a small case and handed it to her unopened, and with a malignant look at Max turned slowly and descended the steps. His footsteps sounded stumblingly on the gravel outside. Marvel listened till they had died away, then with a smothered cry, as though his going alone and in darkness hurt her, she turned away, and sank into her low rocker by the fire.

Max closed the door, and looked down on her, standing opposite. Every furrow deepened in his strong face as he gazed. What had happened to her that she was so wan and changed? Nothing good; he could discriminate between the effects of weal and woe too well. And this mention of her mother—they had never heard of her before! The girl's eyes were feasting on a miniature—she had forgotten everything in its study; with greedy gaze she seemed to draw every feature it represented to her brain to be impressed there too deeply for forgetfulness. There had always been something between them, someone—there was

now. But his mother's command lay on him—she must not be coerced. Suddenly, and for the first time, it occurred to him that they could not go on living together in the same house ; she was a girl and he was a man. And Marvel had lived there so long it would seem so strange to live without her. Strange? It would be death in life ! But she was a girl, she must not go away. If he could persuade her to stay, he would ask an old friend of his mother's to come and live with her, and go away himself, and work for her somehow—somewhere.

Her tears were dropping fast and splashing on the pictured face—and Marvel had no idle tears. In all the years they had lived together he had never seen her cry before to-night. She shaded her eyes with one hand to hide her crying from him, but a lump sprang to his throat, a mist blinded him. He had fought his battle out by the grave on the hillside without a sob ; but this *living* sorrow, this grief of the bright young thing who had lost her cruel sharpness, and who bowed down lower and lower, quivering till her bosom could hold her pain no longer, hurt him sorely. Her bosom heaved with a sob that rent her.

He was on his knees beside her in a moment, his strong frame trembling like a leaf in a storm. He laid her head on his shoulder, and gently stroked her hair.

"O Max, I have only you—only you in all the world!"

It was a cry of mortal agony and despair wrung from

the girl's heart in her hour of desolation. She had been so rich, so proud, so arrogant, felt in her soul of souls a promise of rich life, her right to it, the right every young heart feels to its ultimate inheritance. And although the throbbing heart under the bowed head winced at the despair in that word "only," it was more than he had asked or thought. He pressed the fallen head closer to his breast.

"I 'm a poor substitute for happiness," he said hoarsely, "but I won't fail, so help me, God!"

It was prayer as much as vow; as though in sudden realisation that his own strength was not sufficient to sustain the burden of this passionate soul, that in its abasement had turned to him.

Marvel sobbed herself quiet, and then drew herself from the strong arms that held her. Pushing her tumbled hair from her hot forehead, she placed the miniature in Max's hands.

"This was my mother," she said.

The glass was blurred, and, taking his handkerchief from his pocket, in his deliberate way, Max slowly polished it. Holding it where the light fell full on it he examined it critically, Marvel's eyes fastened on his face meanwhile. Curiosity to know what manner of woman Marvel's mother had been, jealousy for his own mother's sake, tenderness for Marvel, all held him, and the girl waited for his verdict as one does for the verdict of justice, instinctively valuing it.

"She was good and sweet," he said at last, "and true," he added presently.

Marvel drew a long breath, tremulous yet from her sobbing; she stood up, and as though the warmth of the room oppressed her threw open the little window and stood looking at the snow-peaks standing out against the steel-spangled blackness of the sky. Max did not disturb her by question or look—her thoughts were apart from him, his all of her. After quite a long time she began speaking, not tempestuously or with passion, but in a dull voice, and with eyes on the stars over the snow-peaks. She told him the story that Frank Meredith had told to her, and when it was ended grew silent again. Her eyes had left the stars for a patch of light that glowed among the distant bush. So intent was she on the gleaming studio roof that Max's voice startled her.

"I can't bear to hear you talk like that. It is n't natural. At twenty years life is n't over and done—and nothing is so bad that it 's past mending!" But she gave no indication that she heard.

"*Remember not past years*," he added after the silence had become unendurable.

At that she turned.

CHAPTER XVI

"—— OF STORM AND CLOUDINESS"

"THAT 'S not in mortal power," she said, "and if it were, with nothing to remember there 'd be little to have!" She held out her hand to ward Max off, for she saw by the fire in his eyes that he had something to say, and with a movement of grace and dignity drew herself up.

"I 'm going away, to-morrow—alone." Max little guessed that the tragedy of a woman's life was expressed in the pause before that last word. His blood was boiling at the thought that her father had bowed the bright head she had carried so proudly.

"I always meant to go away," she went on, her truthful eyes trying to tell him why; "but I did not think my going would have been in this fashion. To-night has changed many things!" Her eyes dropped, she controlled her quivering lip with difficulty, and cleared her voice, that was hoarse as if with cold, then raised her head again, clasping her hands lightly in front of her.

"You saw me cry a while ago!" she went on, a little break in her voice, but courage in her look. "I 'm sorry for that, because it has given you a wrong impression"—he drew in a long breath, and folded his arms on his broad chest, his head bent towards her, watchful eyes noting every quiver of the changing face—"quite a wrong impression; and I 'm not that sort of girl at all!"

A smile that tried to reassure him trembled round the drooping lips, but threw her eyes into deeper shadow.

"You must n't think that I 'm afraid!"

She pushed her hair off her forehead with a hand that shook; and Max cursed the man he thought had made her tremble. But his lips did not move. He waited in his patient way, anxious to see from the point where she stood. From his point, she was the proud queen of his heart who had been humbled, and although she had ever used her queenship against him, he hated the man who had humbled her.

"I 'm afraid of nothing," she reiterated, "except of bringing more sorrow to this house, or—or—into the life of any I love."

He made a gesture that preceded speech, but she held her ground and did not heed him.

"I 've been a brute to you, Max. No, don't speak, not yet! I 've mocked you and yours since we were children together; and if you wanted to retaliate

you 've grounds enough to go on. I don't ask your pardon—you 're too large to bear a grudge. But I wanted to tell you on this last night of all that I see with open eyes what sort of man you are. To-morrow I begin again. I must go free—but when we meet again, if you wish it, then we 'll still be friends."

The passion in his heart showed through the iron mask of Max's face, it lit and quivered, his voice shook.

"To-night," he said huskily, "for the first time in your life you turned to me of your own free will. Perhaps you did n't know what it meant to me, but it meant something that I 'd give years to live over again. A moment here and there in a life may count more than all that 's gone before or may come after it"—he misunderstood her stifled cry, and with a full look into her eyes reiterated—"more than all that 's gone before or may come after it. You don't know, perhaps." Then in quite a change of tone to determination, he went on emphatically: "The miss of you would hurt more than any pain you could give me. When you go, the light of the day will go, and the starshine from the night."

He bent forward eagerly, and she saw the look in his eyes—yearning passion, humility, tenderness—and drew her breath with a convulsive gasp. No eyes had ever gazed on her so. Not Wynn's, that had feasted on her beauty. She shivered a little—the thought chilled her.

"I have never had my say—you would n't let me,"

he continued, holding out his hands with a dramatic gesture of pleading—" the time had n't come. But in season or out of season I 'll speak now. I love you ! Do you understand ?—love you ! princess or beggar-maid would make no difference. I 've the right of any honest man to tell a love that 's clean and true. I 'm not the sort to go half way and turn back. I take no credit that I must go on and can't change—that 's as much a part of me as getting to a mountain-top when I 've once set out. It came to be in me and will be so while I 've any feeling left. ' As a man thinketh so is he,' and I 'm thinking, Marvel, that the woman a man loves is greater happiness to him, even if she brings him sorrow, than any other sort of life without her."

Ah, then it was true. Wynn did not love her. She heard his cultured, tired voice in the pause of this man's deep, tremulous tones : " We hamper ourselves, we make environments."

" I 'm not right, perhaps," Max proceeded, almost as though he had heard her thought, and pleaded in extenuation ; " quite wrong, maybe, from other men's point of view,"—he moved to the open window as he spoke and looked out where Marvel had looked—" but arguing rarely changes a mind. So that 's the way of it ; it 's the base and the summit of it. I love you ! Time won't alter it, nor absence. I have n't tried to change ; I don't want to. When folks begin to talk about killing their love, it 's mostly dying already ! "

In the silence that followed Marvel stood passively. All the time her heart was hungering for this language on another tongue. Max closed the window, secured the hasp, and turned.

"You talk of going away alone—what will you do?" he asked.

"Oh, Max!" she answered hurriedly and nervously, "there must be something that a girl can do in every city. There must be a place. I will find my place and I will make my life of use. Don't look so doubtful, dear; don't discourage me! One thing I must not do—pull down other lives like my father has done. I want to begin where my grandfather left off."

"I won't coerce you, nor bother you," responded Max. "Every man and woman must walk their own road on their own feet, but my way lies alongside yours till you 're over the ridge. When I see you past labour and danger, I 'll say good-bye, but I 'm not going to leave you at the bottom of the hill!"

He saw a quick look, half alarm, half protest, pass over her face.

"You 'll waste all your life," she cried involuntarily. "I shall never be any happier than I am now."

"Then marry me," he cried, moving a step nearer, again holding out his hands. "If you are not going to happiness, why go? Stay with me. I shall be happy at the least. Dear, as I live, by my mother's grave this day I swore to put you first; to let you go,

if going meant your joy—to hold my tongue and not to say a word. I had given you up, when I came home to hear you say, 'I 've only you!' I know what I am —not the man for a girl like you; but if there is no other—nothing better—" His voice choked, and he stopped.

She took his arm in a convulsive grip. The blood rushed to her face, then left her deadly white. "You don't know what you say. Would you take a girl out of hell?"

"I would take you!" he answered steadily, his gaze unflinching. She met it a moment, wavered, dropped his arm, and turned sadly away.

Her will was almost paralysed, her self-distrust complete. She turned to her step-mother's room by mere force of habit as her latest act at night, and recollected with a shock that it was untenanted. Blowing out the light she carried, she sat down at the open window, the night air cool on her forehead. She heard Max bolt and bar the cottage doors, then go to his room at the back. Silence, deep and profound, settled over the house, and all round about. Her tired head rested on the window-sill, her eyes upon the dismantled bed. It was occupied again in her fancy by the quiet figure that had yet been such a source of strength. What would she say, what had she said? "*Remember not past years.*"

No, no, that could not be. She dared not lay her

burden down—shunt her weariness to other shoulders. Life had now no allurements; the world outside no temptations. Wynn must not be hampered. She knew that now; knew that not only would she drag him down socially, but hold him back from his best self. She did not blame him that he had been mistaken; she had been mistaken also. It was her grandfather's blood in her that had clamoured for light and life, and the pride of life—her grandfather before his fall. She saw him as he had been—proud, passionate, generous; saw him again in the felon's dock pleading guilty before the sea of curious eyes—prouder in his degradation than in his days of innocence; and yet again, chained, in patient submission, working out his own salvation.

"I also will pay!" she murmured, too tired to know how. She would never need reminding where she belonged, she would put herself beyond reproach or appeal, give no trouble to anyone, leave the sunshine for others, unclouded.

But it is not possible to will where the rain shall fall. Her fight was over, her hurt, sensitive mind made no further protest. She had been quick to err, and as quick to detect her mistake, and with her last thought of restitution she drew a warm cover about her head and body, and fell into deep, refreshing sleep, such sleep as only youth's sorrow knows. She slept for some hours, and awoke to early morning quietness.

The light was creeping down the dark mountain-sides, and splashing the misty bush-tops.

What wakened her? Surely she heard her name whispered? She sat up and looked round, warm in the fur of her rug, but cramped from her position. While she looked around dazedly, only half awake, her father's face appeared at the open window. He made an imperative sign to her for silence, and beckoned her to approach. His eyes were bloodshot and bleary, the beckoning hand shook, and his uncombed hair fell in unkempt untidiness over his forehead. Marvel noted that he wore a rough riding-coat, buttoned to his chin. She took his untimely appearance without any sort of emotion—feeling for the time being was spent. This was one of the happenings that did not matter—the intensity which had been exclusively brought to bear upon one object was a thing of yesterday.

"Well," she asked coolly, "what is it? What do you want? I have n't got the money!"

"Hush!" he whispered; "not so loud. I want you to come with me."

"*I* have n't got the money, I tell you!" she repeated pettishly.

"Never mind the money," he said, still in a loud whisper. "I want you; you are my child. Nature and feeling will speak sometimes. Come away from that bigoted, surly brute—I 'll show you life. You 've wasted your sweetness on the desert air too long!"

" Could n't you come in at the door and say it ? " she asked, in her natural voice, looking at him disapprovingly. " There 's no excuse for that way of yours, peering in at windows ! "

His expression lit up with a grim kind of satisfaction, even while he glanced hurriedly past her to see if her words had carried.

" You seem to forget I got the kick-out last night."

She made no answer, but stood deliberating. Would this not be a way out of her difficulty ? If she decided to go with her father, Max would leave her free.

" You 've no sort of claim, you know," she said, after a pause so long that he thought his cause lost, and had thrown more than one apprehensive glance to the horses he had left tied in the distance. " I 'm outside the law, I 'm my own mistress, and if I don't like your life I sha'n't stay. And as for sympathy and affection, you 'll get none from me ! "

Her frowning brow warned him that she was smarting yet from the wound he had dealt, and that he must exercise self-control if he wanted to accomplish his purpose, which was chiefly one of revenge upon Max.

" Do be a little cautious," he urged, still in a stage whisper, gulping down a contemptuous epithet, " and decide one way or other, for I 'm off. It 's no use denying that you 're miserable here ; anyone can see it."

" Can they ? " she queried quickly. Then drawing

herself together by an effort, for she felt a shaking come over her limbs, she went on with contemptuous retort: "And it 's obvious I sha'n't be anything else with you. But I 'll start. I 'll have your company as long as it pleases me, and when it does n't we can part."

His eyes flashed triumphantly. He had stumbled on to a good thing. Life was getting a bit monotonous; old acquaintances shunned, new ones fought shy. Marvel would be an attraction, and he should have trampled on Max. A cheque of Tony's lay over his heart and kept it warm, quite a new pulse beat in his veins. "Be quick, my dear! The bend of the road!" He pointed to where Marvel had so often watched the coach come into sight, and then disappeared.

But Marvel did not obey his injunction. She loitered. First she bathed her face and shoulders; then combed and coiled her hair, and donned her blue serge habit and riding-cap deliberately and neatly. She had taken pains with herself all her life long, and the harsh truths she had been learning lately in no way affected the decencies of daily life. She noticed that her eyes were heavy, and that her cheeks had lost some of their fine bloom; but the fact did not appeal to her self-pity, her mind was too busy with thoughts of what she was about to do. The first sense of relief was shaken by a sudden heart-throb as she sat down to tell Max by pen and ink what she had done. Then, leaving the note where it would catch his eye, she looked back at her

little room again. A faintness stole over her as she tried to realise this might be her last look at the familiar household things. For a moment they were blotted from her vision, then by an effort, with a low, involuntary cry, she pulled herself together and made the final wrench.

Frank Meredith had been swearing at the coldness of the morning and the passage of time fully an hour, when he saw the tall figure of his daughter swinging leisurely towards him through the morning mists.

Max awakened to hear the faint thud of receding hoof-beats. He had slept soundly all night—the first sound sleep for several weeks; anxiety for Marvel, watching beside his mother, and the first poignant sense of loss dissipating rest. His first waking consciousness was the sense of forsakenness the hoof-beats, momentarily growing fainter, gave him; his next was gladness that Marvel was still beneath his roof to be protected, perhaps to be won! His whole being was moved at the thought.

Leaping from his bed, he hastened through his dip in the lake, then, glowing and vigorous from the exercise, strode back to the cottage. Hearing no movement, he cautiously set about lighting a fire and sweeping the hearth, for the heavy, hanging mists seemed like a pall, and had penetrated into the cottage. When the wood blazed he was better pleased, but he softly ad-

justed this and rearranged that in the fashion that Marvel approved. When the kettle boiled, and he had toasted bread and bacon and boiled eggs for two, there was nothing more to be done except wait, and in the waiting the want of her grew to an ache. The unusual stillness was past bearing in the end. He had tried to account for it by the fact that she was wearied and slept late, but the more he endeavoured to reassure himself, the more he failed in content, for the miss of her had overwhelmed him with a feeling of peril.

A stride or two brought him to her door, and instantly he knocked. Eavesdropping was not his fashion. When no answer came to his repeated knocking, with a throbbing heart he called, " Marvel, I 'm coming in ! "

The knob yielded, and the sight of the unpressed bed startled him. He no sooner saw it than he knew that she had gone. All the morning his heart had been full of sadness and disappointment—had felt that he was forsaken. He had tormented himself for sight of her, while his senses were conscious that she was not near.

Suddenly he remembered the sound of departing hoof-beats. His brain turned dizzy, and he leaned where she had leant a little time ago—against the door-post. His eyes saw the letter pinned to her mirror, but it was a moment or so before he moved to possess it. The shapely, long-fingered hands trembled

as he cut the envelope with his pocket-knife—" I have gone, dear, with my father. It is best. Marvel."

As he grasped the idea, the colour came back to his lips and the fire to his deep-set eyes. The shaggy brows uplifted a little. Half an hour sufficed to breakfast and possess himself of a saddled horse and start in pursuit. It took no reflection to decide that Frank Meredith and Marvel must remain for ever separate, and as he rode forward through the mist his mouth was set like a vice, his brows met above his eyes, and even had he known how many years would pass before he gazed again on the beloved landscape through which he rode unheeding, he would scarce have turned his eyes to the right or the left in his watchfulness of the road ahead.

Infinite love of the girl and infinite hate of the man he pursued possessed him. The two opposing passions absorbed him. The few people whom he passed, and who called out a friendly good-day, receiving no answer or sign of recognition, stared after the horse and rider, who appeared in unity of mind and person. Max was known, not as a violent man, but as a man of justice. He turned away from injustice as from an infection, and his acquaintances felt without argument that he would as soon destroy himself as anything else that opposed his conception of it. He thus escaped much question—and those who noticed his face that morning knew that he was in antagonism with somebody. A

leisurely rider, a visitor to that part, passing him and receiving no response to his greeting, turned in his saddle, and looked after the powerful figure riding through the mist.

"*Why, what's the matter,*" quoth he, "*that you have such a February face, so full of frost, of storm and cloudiness?*"

Arrived at the end of the dreary "wilderness," over whose rough slab-stones the horse picked his way carefully, Max forded the stream, and by force of old association, reined in his steed to look at the old tumble-down inn where Mary Meredith had met the man who had robbed and mocked him a second time. And there, looking from the broken window of the bar-parlour of the days gone by, was Frank Meredith. Max drew a deep breath. If thought could have annihilated, Frank Meredith would have suffered instant extinction. His self-estimation, his insolent assurance, seemed to stamp every feature of his face as he gazed over a scene on which he had looked so often in other days. The hateful personality of the man intensified itself to Max's renewed sight of him, and when, as though feeling the strong hatred directed at him, the step-father turned sharply and encountered the look of concentrated passion on the face of the young man he had rejoiced to torture once upon a time, he was petrified with horror. He waited for a moment, incapable of movement, expecting a bullet; but Max, struck only by his look,

and dismounting, made to enter as Marvel had rejoined her father.

For more Frank Meredith did not wait; he fled by the back entrance, from which he had crept once before with the money-bags. Instinct is swifter than reason, and at that moment he could not attain to the power of thought, and deferred argument, feeling that it would not avail, however logical. There was a one-sided compulsion about Max's manner that quickly determined him to keep out of sight, at least till after dark, when he hoped to gain possession of a horse.

Marvel was lost to him—he realised that; and as he wandered about during the hours that preceded night-fall he was in the disposition to curse the girl for having insisted upon a rest. Human nature had its limits, and his had been tested almost to straining point while his daughter slept on the remains of an old leather couch, and he had been left to people the silence with the ghosts of the past.

Faint with hunger, sick with depression, numbed with the damp and cold, he crept back stealthily in the evening shadows. The tumble-down inn made a black spot on the river bank, its angles outlined against a grey sky. But one window showed a light, and towards this, as though impelled by some feeling stronger than his fear, Frank Meredith went inch by inch. He halted suddenly, for in the square of light appeared the dark head and face that had haunted him all day.

Frank Meredith bit his lips to keep back the cry that rose to them—a cry that changed to a muttered curse. But even as he cursed his eyes were riveted—the power which Nature had stamped on the countenance of the young man held him. He realised without any philosophic analysis that this man's will was to be the law that determined the present crisis; and whether the sentiment arose from self-pity, or some not quite dead instinct of virtue, the feeling came that for him there was to be no moral rebuilding, that the fatal law of reaping what had been sown was being dealt to him. The lineaments of his lawgiver's face promised no mercy. And while his eyes dwelt on it line by line, something of the justice in the situation, that here, where he had rejected, he was being rejected in turn, maddened him. For the first time he wished that Mary Meredith lived, and the dead woman was in part avenged. Involuntarily his hand closed over the heavy stick he carried from the bush—the movement was in sympathy with his thoughts—then the twitching fingers became conscious of the weapon they held, and the coward's desire for revenge caused them to clutch it spasmodically. He drew in his breath, his lips parted over his teeth, he raised his right arm cautiously, took deliberate aim, and struck his adversary a crashing blow in the face.

CHAPTER XVII

"I 'LL GO TO HER, AND SAY TO HER——"

TONY had decided that the time had come for speech. At first he had been too confounded by Marvel's beauty, and things generally, to command the technique of suitable words in which to convey his desires; but the girl was no longer hampered with the care of a dying woman, and her movement towards himself had, of late, been decidedly sympathetic. He sprang from his bed and emerged from his tub to make a careful toilet, determined to go in and win. Braced by the incontestable mental position he had taken, he donned a new mountaineering suit of fawn tweeds that had been consigned to him by his Bond Street tailor, and holding his head up as befitted the dignity of his destiny, omitting the trifling incident of breakfast, went forth to conquer, cheerfully whistling "*When Johnnie comes marching home again!*" the expression of his eyes indicating that he would be called to a higher destination. But Nature, this morning,

seemed to lack intelligence, and absolutely refused any cheery manifestation. The great snow-cones were shrouded, colour and sparkle of water lay under a pall, and the tussock and bracken were sodden with mist, which lay like a breath of hoar-frost upon every blade of grass and bough of bush.

Tony increased his pace, ruining, as he strode on, the immaculate polish of his boots; his eyes were not on the track, but searched restlessly from right to left, and forward, for a figure usually abroad in the early morning. The lake, like a great intelligence, was sad of mood, and sighed with every breath. Tony whistled louder and tried not to watch for the white frill of water that emerged from the mist with every incoming wavelet and then withdrew; it reminded him of handkerchiefs being waved in farewell.

He left whistling presently for soliloquy, as, sighting Beach Cottage, he made a sharp *détour*. Morning was the time to tell a girl of love—its early hours matched her purity and freshness. A man's understanding and intelligence were clear, he was free from the sensuous glamour of the night; every word told. He would go to her, and say to her— Confound the mist, how it got into a fellow's eyes!

The cottage again. He felt a sudden sinking at the heart, and stood still and stared at it. It looked a phantom cottage in a world of cloud, and had lost all its old air of solidity and comfort. The mist had filled

the hollow at its base, and cut off its approaches, and by a peculiar effect of the light it appeared upborne on a cloud, sailing away toward the peaks, unreal, ethereal. Tony shivered. By Jove, how cold it was! and how wet his boots were! It was an error of judgment to start any momentous undertaking on an empty stomach; physical law was a law—in the common rut of life, of course, but still a law, don't you know.

He faced towards the inn, purely to conform to the law of physical nature, and eat. Food warmed the blood and gave force to the brain, and all that a man achieved had its birth in his brain! He ordered coffee, two eggs, a cutlet, and toast; and when the giant's repast was set before him, murmured gently at the delay, cracked an egg, cut a slice of toast into strips, and drank a cup of steaming coffee. Feeling refreshed, he went to his room and changed his wet boots and stockings, which he ought to have done first, and to the fact of which omission he ever afterwards attributed a decline of energy and spirits, datable to that morning.

After donning the boots he reconsidered the Bond Street suit. No, it did not quite appeal to him—he had previously overlooked its disadvantages; it had no appeal about it, anybody might have worn it. It said to no one, "Do you remember?" and there was a language of old clothes, don't you know, like the language of old friendship, that asked, "Do you remember, I was worn on that first occasion you were so sweet?

This sleeve covered the arm where your hand rested, this rent was made that day in your service when you asked for an inaccessible rose." Yes, Tony preferred the old suit—it gave an æsthetic value to its wearer, and on this day his *ensemble* must co-ordinate towards a higher end. It was not so much beauty of person that attracted as attributed beauty.

Noon was fading into early afternoon when Tony returned a second time. The mist phenomenon had played havoc with him, he looked pinched and worn. He had seen Marvel in her sombre gown a hundred times and hastened to overtake an illusion. It was a day of empty shadows. Wynn had been at the studio all the morning, gone before Tony rose, leaving a message that he had work on hand that admitted no disturbance. Frank Meredith had departed also before Tony's advent that morning, and Max's tall figure was nowhere visible on hill and dale, and Tony's understanding grasped an old fact with new insight, that it is the simple friendships of life that give it its real sweetness.

In the afternoon he changed his garb again for the conventional call. To meet a lady haphazard, tweeds were right; but even here at the end of the world no nice-minded man lacked in the courtesies. He would call on Marvel and say that he feared the strain of yesterday had wearied her. He should see her in the mellow light of the fire. Her household duties done,

she would have leisure to receive him, and to listen. Seated before the glowing logs, they would drift into familiar talk, and in a pause—just exactly what had gone before he could not decide, but in one of those eloquent pauses that only familiar friends can appreciate—he would slip in with his great request—it seemed greater as the day advanced—and softened by the hour, the twilight hour of reverie and contemplation and wistfulness, she would answer — would answer — ? Tony's heart leaped to meet the word. What would she say ?

He was near the cottage now, and lifted the long tails of his frock-coat from contact with the wet grass, and stepped gingerly because of his patent leather boots. He went to the front or veranda entrance by reason of the formality of his visit, so that when no firelight glowed through the window it did not strike him with that sense of chill, as when, having received no answer, he, after a lengthy pause, went to the entrance from the lake, and, ascending the steps, found the hospitable door barred and the chimney smokeless.

But, of course, the house was untenanted now, and Marvel was at the studio. This was what Wynn called "the children's hour," between the dark and the daylight, his time of idling. Tony quickened again, pulses and step, and the warm lamplight shining through the glass roof made his eyes brighten when he beheld it.

In answer to his knock Wynn opened. He looked

past Tony into the gloom as though expecting or hoping for some other, then turned and left his visitor to close the door, and reseated himself in a voluminous chair. After a curious glance at Tony, as though struck by his careful get-up, he leaned back and examined the finger-tips of first one hand and then the other. Tony felt *de trop*. Wynn looked tired and bored, but the curtain was drawn between the working and the social half of the studio, and Wynn was rarely subjected to the intrusion of a questioner. His manner this afternoon permitted no familiarity and acted on Tony very much as a shower-bath would do on a man wet to the skin with rain.

"Beastly day!" volunteered Wynn, and Tony agreed heartily. Neither asked the question they both thought, "Have you seen Marvel?" nor did they try to force conversation. To both the memory of yesterday appealed, and courtesy alone forbade the elder man turning the younger out. Tony did not harmonise with his thoughts of that sweetly animated look which met his mental vision in his interrupted firelight dream. With a prodigious sigh Tony went doorwards, and unlike his usual kindliness and genial charm of manner in wooing his visitor from his fit of depression, Wynn nodded a careless dismissal, and sank again into thought.

The stimulus of Cordelia's presence removed, his late spiritual mood had relaxed. The serene brow, the

liberty of thought that had responded to her magic, had vanished; instead, there was a hardness of look that testified to feeling restrained within a certain limit; the preponderance of one idea weighted him.

At last he rose almost impatiently, and turning out the lamps securely locked the studio, and turned towards the cottage. Action, he felt, was imperative, though dangerous. He would go to Marvel, and insist upon a speedy marriage, then make their plans known to Max.

In the darkness surrounding the cottage he bumped into Tony.

"I b—beg your pardon," stuttered he when he could find breath. "I hope I have n't hurt you? There 's nobody at home, don't you know!"

"I did n't know or I should n't be here!" answered Wynn with an edge on his voice that filed Tony's sensitive feelings. Wynn was irritated. The whole position precipitated itself upon him unpleasantly; the two domains—that in which he stood a distinguished man, entitled to consideration, and that which left him open to the vulgar suspicion he detected in Tony's voice—touched one another too closely. And, God! he belonged to both! He made an involuntary movement to leave the other man in undisputed possession of the field. That his wife could be approached by a Tony Armstrong with any reasonable hope or right, cheapened Marvel in his eyes and vulgarised himself

in his own. The unexpected encounter brought his state of mind to a climax, and while Tony was wondering what the deuce was the matter with Wynn that he was so confoundedly huffy, Wynn was strangling his inclination to take his companion by the scruff of the neck and throw him into the lake.

In the licence he gave his mood in its escape from his will, that night ever stood to him for a descent into hell where he was scorched and scarred. And all through the fire it was Cordelia's voice, her eyes, her spiritual presence, that held him to that which made it possible for him to say, when he faced the day again, "I will not be a scoundrel."

But he was thankful for the reprieve, and in the interval worked as one to whom work is salvation. And the beauty of the face, looking out at him with sombre eyes from its environment of cloud, pleaded for the girl; won its old place in the man's affection.

When a week had passed without any word or sign from either Max or Marvel, wholesome curiosity not unmixed with anxiety and vexation had dissipated morbid regret. As for Tony, he was limp and lone. Wynn's bitter confession to himself of weakness and failure had humbled him, but Tony seemed unconscious of any overtures, his soul was out of harmony with all the world, and all his force was concentrated on watching the cottage for sign of habitation. When one morning he saw the smoke curling from the chimney,

a critical bystander would have pronounced him insane. While his blood was yet in a whirl and his pulses beating like sledge-hammers, the kitchen door opened, and Marvel, dressed in the old familiar blue serge, came down the steps towards him. Before Tony could realise the situation and place himself advantageously before her, he found her hand in his, and her dark eyes penetrating, it seemed to him, to his soul of souls. He had no words, there seemed no need of any; an indescribable exaltation and expansion had come to life, its horizons were boundless! When he could see, he noted that Marvel's face was pale and her lips tremulous. By common impulse they turned from the direction of the studio and faced the snow-fields, which were gleaming like solid silver in the bright sunshine. Manapouri was its deepest blue. Nature had dressed the morning in purple and white.

"So *glad* to see you, you don't know!" murmured Tony, taking side glances at every step, with a desperate effort to appear at ease, while he trembled in every limb.

But his companion did not seem to note his embarrassment; her vision was turned inward.

"It 's a glowious morning!" proceeded Tony, who revelled in its light, and the transition that the girl's presence had made on earth and sky. His eyes were opened to see the gleaming hoar-frost on the grass in the hollows; he heard the birds calling from the

bush. Only when he looked up at Marvel's face again did his own sadden—there was a look of age upon its youth.

"Yes," she said dreamily, and as though almost surprised, "it is beautiful. Has it ever struck you, Mr. Armstrong, how absolute, how sufficient unto itself, Nature is? It has a spirit that is unconscious of all circumstance."

"I—ah!" responded Tony, tip-toeing in his anxiety to rise to this unexpected mood of Marvel's. "Nature is pwofound, powerful, even selfish. It goes its own way, don't you know, without any considewation for anybody. Its motives spwing fwom itself, it is beyond the influence of anything extewior, anything foweign. It considers its own laws alone," concluded he a little resentfully.

"It has eternal youth," said the girl not yet twenty.

"Age," responded Tony, "if it were not a tewwible symptom which pwecedes death, would be—er—a time of peace. The home is then a—a—sanctuary where two hearts—possibly more, don't you know—beat as one"—he took a long, adoring look, seeing a vision of what he trusted was not wholly inaccessible, and gulped down a big heart-throb—"for the twain that are one flesh have expewienced that the—er—affections and—er—duties that are habitual are not wholly bawen of joy, don't you know."

Marvel turned to him quickly, and with a little

caressing movement held his arm a moment with her hand.

" Thank you ! " she said, with the slightest possible tremor in her tones. " I shall remember that."

They crunched the scented bracken beneath their feet for a silent pace or two, then the girl went on : " I think that is the way to look at life."

She made a desperate attempt to crush down some emotion, and turning her troubled eyes to Tony, proceeded : " All sorts of difficulties are anticipated that never come to pass. When we are young, just because we are young, we fancy unless we get a certain thing that we shall always be poor. I *know*, because—because I have had that kind of obstinacy myself." She flushed and grew embarrassed, then went on desperately: " But everyone feels in the end that the happiness of others is better than your own ; is, in fact, your own."

" Miss Mewedith—" gasped Tony. But what more he had to say was never spoken.

" I 'm not Miss Meredith," interrupted Marvel, " I 'm married. To Max. I 'm Mrs. Hawthorne now."

Again she laid her hand softly on Tony's arm. He felt her action. He saw that the sun still shone ; knew that he walked one of earth's fairest by-ways ; felt that the waters along the shore were trying to say something soothing. But it was the end of the world

to him. Those short sentences, " I 'm not Miss Meredith. . . . I 'm Mrs. Hawthorne now," had changed more lives than his.

" Max has been ill—very ill," proceeded the voice by his side. " My father hurt him, and disappeared. It was my father's work, not anything that can be healed, or passed over, or forgotten. Max may be blind for life—helpless ! Think of it—helpless ! All this "—her voice rose to a cry, and she waved her hand with a gesture indicating the magnificence of mountain and lake—" all this lost to him for ever. And Max had only three things in life—his mother, the mountains, and me ! "

She still walked on, more quickly than at first, and while yet the intoxication of her presence warmed existence for Tony, an inner voice warned him of the solitary years to come, out of sight, out of harmony; of his empty house where he would watch in his heart for this dazzling vision, watch without expectation, with a faithfulness ever ready for her, and no hope of her coming. He listened to many things she had to say ; his senses interpreted but one fact : " I 'm married to Max. I 'm Mrs. Hawthorne now."

He roused at length.

" Will you tell Wynn ? " she asked. " I 'm always bothering you."

Something in the pitiful eyes and their entreating expression stilled selfish sorrow. The exhaustion of

the girl's face and frame appealed to that unselfish tenderness that lies at the bottom of most men. He stepped close up beside her, his look as soft as a woman's, checked his first word and impulse, then, free from the burden of self, took her cold, trembling hand in both his own, and patted it reassuringly.

"Don't you twouble about me, Miss—Mrs. Hawthorne. I 'm vewy gwateful for your confidence and twust, don't you know. And if ever I can—er—pwove that—" His eyes fell, he moved uneasily from one foot to the other, then added desperately: "Our fwiendship has been quite out of the common wut, don't you know. But I weally *must* be going."

"I 've hurt him someway, I know I have," said Marvel, looking after him; "but it can't be helped," she added. "We most of us get hurt one way or another!"

Night had come down once more upon Manapouri, and the windows of Beach Cottage sent their bright shafts of light over the water. In the kitchen Marvel moved softly about in the glow of the fire. She did her work with her old deftness, but with a weary sort of patience, slackening speed, struggling back with an effort, relaxing again, and finally, sinking into her old rocker and leaning her bright head on the cushion, slipped into absorbed thought. The house was wrapped in silence; silence deeper than death had brought it. Then suddenly quick firm footsteps ap-

proached and ascended to the door. The sluggish blood leaped at the girl's heart and coursed through her veins, her eyes were startled and wide; she half rose, then sank to her seat again, and clasping her hands together, called in answer to the knock:

"Come in!"

Wynn entered, and closed the door after him in that neat, precise way of his Marvel knew and liked. She rose languidly and closed another door leading to the lobby, then turned to face the man she loved, and who waited with question in his face. His bearing, his beauty, the subtle fragrance of his clothes, the sight, the feeling of him were such a stimulus that the reaction after her torpor made her giddy; she sat down again, and Wynn moved opposite, looking down upon her. She felt his eyes and dared not look up.

"Speak," she said at length, almost in a whisper, "say what you came to say!"

He missed her old imperious manner. He had raced here in order to speak what was in his mind—his indignation at her treatment of him. He had braced himself to a sacrifice which she had disdained; shocked him by an indecency. She belonged to him by love, and by the rights of love; he had felt it impossible for her ever to disregard those rights, and in the first moments of triumph over his regrets and comparisons she had set him aside contemptuously.

"What is there to say to make your action understandable? It is inexplicable!" he said.

She winced at his bitterness of tone, but most at the curled lip. "Then why did you come?" she flashed out at him. She could not bear to seem other than true. Wanting in moral scruple, she had saved his soul at the cost of her own, but she had not strength to meet with calmness the scorn in his eyes. She wrestled with her rising passion, then said in agonised entreaty: "You *must* have known, you must, that it was all a mistake—a deadly mistake. It never would have been, never, had I known what I knew later. It would have been murderous for you—have killed all for you——"

And incoherently at first she stumbled into her tale; told without reserve or exaggeration all that had been revealed to her by her father; of Max's love, of her determination to face life alone and begin anew; of her flight and Max's action; her father's revenge, and the verdict of the doctors that the blow would possibly result in lifelong blindness.

"Can you understand now?" she asked when her recital came to an end. "Could I leave him then, alone and in the dark, after years of cherishing? My father had worked enough misery to him and his, yet he was willing to shelter and protect me—shamed though I was—and could I leave him then?"

Never had Wynn seen her so moved and tremulous.

There was a pitiful energy through all she said that sought to direct him from the fact that she had renounced for his sake. Her unselfishness affected him poignantly, and there was a pathos in it almost unbearable. And if ever he loved her it was then ; for through all she said and had done was that painful note of self-depreciation that had made herself of no account for his sake—to save him and his name for the old ways. While he had been fretting for the morrow, she had developed a capacity for heroism that put him to shame. In her chastened beauty, with love and courage and patience shining from her eyes, she looked more desirable than he had ever seen her look, and the thought occurred, was it not possible he had let a prize of life slip from his grasp ?

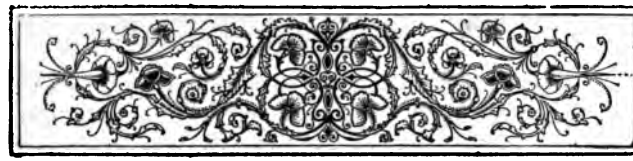
" Had you no thought for me ? " he asked chokingly ; and in all that tale of sorrow that was Marvel's happiest moment, for she met the tenderness of his glance.

" That is all dead and done with now ! " she said, rising with that quiet and newly attained dignity that became her so well. " It is Max now."

They discussed his hurt, Wynn eagerly suggesting what might be done ; relieved at the thought of action, eager in some way to make up for an unconscious wrong done to the man whom he so greatly admired. It was impossible to sit down calmly, he said, and accept darkness for such a man ; a man who found

heaven in the light of day. And Marvel listened, realising that every soul has its own unfathomed depths that not the dearest and nearest can sound. But Wynn was suffering too while he talked so passionately—her shame, her loss, her humiliation! The expression of her eyes was that of a woman out in the wilderness. He pressed her hands convulsively and hurried away, and as he stumbled along in the dark he muttered hoarsely: "It won't bear talking or thinking of—it is only to feel."

And Marvel with her face pressed to the glass was straining her eyes after him as he went. "It is all over and done!" she murmured. "You can go through life without me, my darling. And it would be all loneliness and solitariness for Max. It is all over and done with, for ever."



CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAD ARTIST

LIFE had once more broken its chains of winter, spring sunshine melted the snow, avalanches fell, rumbled, echoed and re-echoed in the clear upper air; gorges and streams roared and seethed deep in the untrodden forest, filled by the bounteous falls in their reckless dance. Blue mountain-ducks, with their broods of young, fearlessly paddled among the water-reeds and rushes; the golden toi-toi waved its feathery head among the giant ferns; white clematis trailed over the dark birches, and in every shaded nook and cranny mountain lilies and red and purple flora smiled from the rocks, while far up the heights the eidelweiss called for the eye and hand of man. All the air was filled with music of water and birds, and the new leaves whispering together of a new world.

Into the song of the golden morning a man's voice blended—

"My object all sublime
I shall achieve in time

To let the punishment fit the crime,
The punishment fit the crime."

And the great mountains—Wynn's only audience—seemed to uncover their faces to listen, and then to reveil.

" A source of innocent merriment,
Of innocent merriment."

Wynn tended the sail of his little craft that seemed to skip the wavelets of the clear water in time to his song. His straw hat lay at the bottom of the boat, and the breeze blew his abundant hair, a silver thread showing here and there among the gold. The grey eyes had lost something of their keenness, but nothing of the intentness of a year ago; his fair skin was tanned by the mountain air, and the face, although its lines had deepened, had softened in expression ; its look of power had intensified, and somewhere in its expression was that hint of labour accomplished which gives to even a commonplace countenance an uncommon interest, and adds dignity and meaning to a fine one.

His life had been very real to him during the past year, far as he was from the swirl and fever of the world ; he was not a man to pursue shadows, or build vain superstructures that had no solid foundation. His work had justified his hope and his faith in himself. He had lived with his idea till he had expressed it. And the woman on the canvas was an intense

reality to him, but the creature he had brought into life was not the girl whom he had met on this lake a year ago—it was his vision of her, the prophecy of his thought. All these months the fierce passionate eyes had haunted and humbled him. His own genius was used to his chastisement ; alone with his art had been alone with his sin, and no flowery rhetoric would dress it in any other name. Even in his most optimistic mood there was a disordered thought that cast its shadow. He had long ago recognised the selfishness that had jeopardised Marvel's peace even for an hour, and he was suffering at her hands much that she groaned under when first they met—the pain of a generous nature burdened by debt.

More and more as he gathered the fruit of her giving did he crave to repay. It was monstrous to be involved without chance of restoration, the thought was dogmatic and insistent—the half of his life, its honour and all that was his, belonged to Marvel. It was their compact, his sworn bond. His name and protection had been the only one restitution, and he blamed himself none the less bitterly because the girl had swept him unceremoniously from her path ; he guessed the truth too nearly for that—she had detected his indifference. He had taken her strong untrained passions too little into account. But if she acted swiftly she acted largely —having once put her hand to the plough she did not turn back. Often he had stood before that sketch of

her where she turned away, and longed to bring her face to face with himself and see if it was well with her. But she had made any sort of friendship impossible. Max had closed like an oyster. His shrinking from intercourse was too palpable not to respect; but the sight of his "strong man Kwasind" with bandaged eyes, leaning upon the arm of the girl-wife who moved slowly beside him, sent Wynn to the shelter of his studio. His one and only visit to Max had ended badly. At a suggestion of Wynn's that a famous oculist should attend him, the blind giant had visibly trembled.

"Owe no man anything!" he said with churlish brevity. Did he suspect? It was impossible to know, but never since his closer relations with Marvel had he renewed by so much as a tone the old intimacy. So that Wynn had been alone with his work, and the high-strung nature of the man had realised a little what the banishment of Hagar stood for.

In spite of this, however, he had had no thought of desertion. He came with an object, and in this he had been a law unto himself. His dream and he were wedded till death or its realisation did them part. But this individual life had left an indelible mark upon him; the more so that he at no time had been in love with artificiality.

"My object all sublime
I shall achieve in time,"

and rounding a headland cut the refrain short and gave him business with the sail; for the fresh wind blew briskly at the bend, which he dodged by keeping closely in shore. He sailed with deliberate purpose. Months ago he had promised Cordelia Grey to visit her father; but—and here again he had been his own lawgiver—he would not indulge himself in any possibility of joy during his penance, or put Cordelia's face and influence between his realised conception of *A Spirit of Storm*. The birth of a child to Marvel had cut his bonds and bound her afresh to Max. This fact, and his completed work, set his conscience free; the future was still his own. With a deep breath he awakened to feel himself forgiven by circumstance, if not in his secret thought.

He loitered on the glittering waters, by no means in haste to be through with this first day's emancipation, so that it was in the red gold of sunset that he came to the pebbly crescent bay where, in a grove of birch-trees, backed by the everlasting mountains, stood the log cottage where "the mad artist" and his daughter dwelt. Under the natural avenue of trees he followed the ascending path, crunching tender ferns at every step. There was no sign of life about the quaint cottage, but Wynn's quick eye detected the open door. He ascended the steps.

The room, with its painted walls and pillars, was flooded with the crimson light of the setting sun. At

the farther end of the room a tall commanding figure of a man with snow-white hair stood in a dramatic attitude with upraised arm. He wore a faded crimson silk dressing-gown; and although his back was turned towards the door there was something so striking about his appearance that Wynn involuntarily paused. His head was thrown back, and in the undisguised accents of an educated man he was anathematising the unseen.

"Sir," he said—and in that first word Wynn recognised the sweetness of Cordelia's voice—"if You are a Gentleman it is time we came to an understanding——"

Wynn knocked.

"My daughter believes in You," he proceeded, unheeding the knock, "in the justice of Your dealings. As for me, I can only say that if You are Almighty You are taking a prolonged advantage of a lady's faith."

His arm fell to his side, and Wynn knocked again. But again the voice and arm were upraised.

"Deal with me, man to man, Sir, but spare a woman——"

Wynn's knocking made itself heard, and the figure turned abruptly. It was a fine face that met the younger man's eyes—sensitive, clear-cut, with lofty brow and blue-black eyes that were shining then with the intensity of the passion Wynn had surprised. A white beard fell upon the broad chest. He looked like one of the patriarchs of old, the folds of his dressing-

gown not hiding the length of limb or detracting from his stateliness.

He bowed low.

"Mr. Grey, I presume?" said Wynn, matching the bow. "I fear that my call may appear intrusive. I am Wynn Winter, and have long desired to make your acquaintance, sir, who are a fellow of the brush."

Mr. Grey's face illumined. "You are welcome, sir —you honour me," he replied, a sudden agitation making itself perceptible through the stately and old-fashioned courtesy of his manner. "Your name was a familiar one before my daughter had the pleasure of meeting you. Pray be seated. Cordelia will return from her ramble presently, and what a surprise for her! She spoke of your coming and believed in it. I—er—doubted. I have learned a trick of doubt. It is a reprehensible weakness of age. I ask your pardon, sir." Then, as though the words recalled the scene Wynn had interrupted, he added without prefix, "I was rehearsing—a line from a comedy!"

His eyes had lost their light, and looked tired, an anxious expression stole into them; but his scrutiny of Wynn's face told him nothing, and Wynn moved to examine the painted windows and walls. When he turned again to his host he was startled. The man's face had flushed, his features were pinched and drawn. He muttered half to himself:

" I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all express me:
So it seems I stand on my attainment."

Whatever had been on Wynn's tongue to say, he did not say it: fear of his criticism and despair were so plainly written upon the old man's countenance. He had stumbled upon a tragedy—a life of labour that had fallen short.

" You are taking the measure of my hand?" he asked a little defiantly, throwing his head back to face the successful man.

" I am admiring your work, sir," answered Wynn, meeting the faded eyes with a steady gaze. He was known for the justice of his criticism. Dilettantism shrank from the harshness of it; for the man who had never spared his own sensibilities where art was concerned had no mercy upon the falling short of others. If it was worth anything it was worth a life's devotion, and something told him this man had given his life in vain. The words of Browning's painter occurred to Wynn—

" I do what many dream of all their lives.
Dream? strive to do, and agonise to do,
And fail in doing."

And this man's work was nobler, because without reward he laboured still. For the life of him Wynn could not have uttered one word to bow the grey head.

An unaccustomed wave of emotion rose to his throat and choked him; success had drifted out of the old man's reach.

"A life's labour is sacred. I honour you!" he said huskily, and held out his hand.

At that moment a white figure gleamed in the doorway, and Wynn met the eyes that shone like the silver of stars. Cordelia's fair skin grew rosy, or was it the sunset flush that brightened it?

"Thou hast been long, but I was sure that thou wouldst come," she said, smiling as she gave her soft, cool hand.

Wynn had a sense of healing as he held it, the suffering in which he had been involved slipped from him. The girl looked at him attentively.

"Thou hast been paying the price of fame," she said softly, and in the half-moment's pause before she concluded the sentence Wynn felt the blood of shame burn in his face—"labour!" she added.

"Labour the price of fame!" burst from her father before Wynn could answer her. "And how many labourers win it? One in a hundred—ten hundred! Labour is the blood of genius, spilled often in vain. There is a set of workers who never know the immortal fire, clever at hunting consideration, who fight hand to hand the hostility and indifference of the world and force a reputation. But a proud spirit regards the struggle beneath it, and dies unknown."

His voice sank into tones of infinite pathos. For a moment silence fell upon the room, now grey in twilight shadow. Cordelia's voice broke the spell and created a new atmosphere.

"Our guest fasts, father mine! Wilt thou not dress, dear heart, while I prepare supper?"

"I beg your pardon," he said, and disappeared.

Wynn was appalled by this sombre figure—type of what he himself might have been, towards which he might have gravitated. While Cordelia moved softly about the room he sauntered beneath the trees, conscious of another self that pitied, instead of despised, failure. Existence would have been impossible to himself under such circumstances; yet here was a man, dead to the world, who evidently had made desperate struggles for life. He shivered at the abyss presented. In his keen passion for life the thought of nothingness was acutest torture. Then, with a throb, almost of pain, he thought of the sweet youth of Cordelia, consumed and shadowed by the failure of her father. Consumed? shadowed? Nay, he must recognise that she was typical of joy and peace. Ah! there he had it; she had peace, not hope—hope that seduced the heart to restlessness and distraction.

When he returned to the cottage, Cordelia and her father awaited him. The room and table pleased his fastidious taste in its arrangement of flowers and lights; the table-linen was spotless and of a fine quality,

although, as he observed later, it was darned in many places. The darns were exquisitely done, and told their own story of poverty and scrupulous neatness. Mr. Grey wore a black coat, much worn, and of an old-fashioned make, but free from any kind of speck ; his linen, too, was faultless as Cordelia's gown. Her pure, radiant beauty transfigured the little room, and Wynn missed nothing : the simple meal might have been a banquet for all he knew, till, with an assumption of ease, Mr. Grey said :

" Cordelia, you have forgotten wine—Mr. Winter will drink wine ! "

The girl looked with a shadow of surprise and reproach at her father, then said simply, " We have no wine."

Her clear eyes sought those of her guest, her voice was low but distinct, and something in the unaffected simplicity of the statement repudiated pretence.

" I am sorry," she added, still to Wynn, whose answer brought her bright smile. But the old man did not leave the matter there ; blamed himself for his negligence—his oversight that their isolated position made it impossible to rectify. And meanwhile Cordelia's eyes fell as if in shame, not at poverty, but at the insincerity that attempted to apologise for and hide it.

She bore herself with the unaffected ingenuousness that accepted the simplicity of her surroundings, and

presided over them with the grace that would have made luxury seem immaterial, an accidental setting. If her father wandered off into railing against an unappreciative public, or sank into melancholy, she brought him back to the real and the happy, in a way that instantly occupied his thoughts outside himself.

That Mr. Grey, with a daughter of such exceptional beauty, should be isolated from all intercourse with the world seemed remarkable to Wynn until he learned his curious history. At college it appeared he had developed an abnormal love of painting, and devoted his time to it, to the neglect of other work. His father, who had other aims for him, tried to discourage the idiosyncrasy, and, ultimately disappointed, had cut him adrift. Till middle age the man had dabbled, possessed by the idea that a masterpiece would justify him to himself and the world. Late in life he had married a fair young Quakeress, of good family and small fortune, which, his listener surmised, had been spent in the hopeless quest. At her death he brought his daughter to the wild magnificence of Fiordland, possessed still with the haunting thought of success—a thought which had developed to mania.

"I am accustomed to misrepresentation," he concluded, with that excitement of tone and gesture peculiar to him when art was the subject of discussion.

"I have been a martyr to the dishonesty of dealers. The hope of many men would have been killed long

ago. Look at my hair, white, sir, but my day will come!"—his voice sank to a whisper, his trembling, nervous hands clasped—"my day will come!"

"The moon has risen!" said Cordelia, rising and leading to the door.

His host had pressed Wynn to stay for the night, and being assured that his presence would in no way incommode, he had consented. Mr. Grey joined him in his saunter to the shore.

"A fine country!" he said enthusiastically, "and as yet an almost untouched field. The novelist as well as the painter, sir, has ample working ground—there are countless unpainted pictures and unwritten stories, for to these shores have drifted much of the flotsam and jetsam of the civilised world. Many a dead hope and blasted life finds its resurrection under the southern cross!" He pointed as he spoke to the starry symbol of hope. "And resurrection," he added, "must always be more interesting than crude birth."

"There is poetry, too," answered Wynn, "sometimes a terrible poetry, in new existence, with its fresh condition of thought and action, feeling its bond to the old and troubled by its youthful and contradictory inclinations."

"Experience strengthens." It was Cordelia's sweet, clear voice.

Wynn turned to her with deference where she stood like a spirit of the silvery night. For a moment he

looked into her face, then at the white-haired old man walking slowly away.

"Where it does not crush!" he answered sadly.

They turned by one consent and wandered to the pebbly bay, and again Wynn fell under the spell of the girl's limitless hope. They talked of other scenes and other lives, he sometimes with almost passionate eagerness, she with delightfulness of comprehension and knowledge, but as two who had long known each other and were drawn together by a knowledge of something that hurt, to which hurt she somehow brought healing and suggestion of heroism. She softened all she touched, freed their converse from restricted and personal meaning. The tone of her mind was a tonic to him, and lifted him above the torturing regret of the past months. Then she asked a question that brought him to earth with a shock.

"How does Max Hawthorne bear his blindness?"

"I cannot tell you. He is reticent and proud!" he answered with a tone of impatience.

"I can understand that kind of pride," she responded quietly, "the pride that does not pose, but accepts a destiny of sorrow, even of death, without a cry."

He flashed a look at her. Her clear-cut profile showed plainly in the moonlight, and the serenity of her countenance was not marred.

"And Marvel's marriage, too," she proceeded.

"There are women who have a fund of devotion to whom happiness is not all-sufficient; to such sacrifice is essential. She hath a tameless spirit, and the child will console her."

Because he ought to have been her strength and had not, a shadow of foreboding darkened the light of his face. For a moment a whirl of feeling, a longing to be rid of his secret and let this woman be his judge, almost carried away his reserve. The next he remembered that his betrayal of Marvel would be dastardly, and a dull red dyed his face at the consciousness that Cordelia was separate and apart from the ignoble of life.

"And the young man, Tony?" she asked again smilingly.

"He has sent no word since his departure."

CHAPTER XIX

TWO PICTURES

WYNN stood before his second completed picture, and it was the face of Cordelia that looked at him from the canvas. A light of more than pleasure was on the painter's face as he gazed; the tense, strained, nervous look of the worker who has lived for months with one idea had quelled the old youthful expression, but there was a softness in the eyes, a curve to the cynical mouth, that added to the original power and strength of the face.

"You lifted me, like the strength that you are," he murmured; then veiling the pictured face went out. He threw his shoulders back and drew in the scented air of woodland and water. It was one of those magic autumn days that seem emancipated from time, marking no past, hinting no future. Every fragrance and tint, every gleam and glint of every season seemed to have gathered itself into the glamour and richness of the hour, giving the senses liberty, making every joy seem accessible.

As Wynn strolled on, he occasionally paused to gaze up and around as though he would fain draw into deepest memory the immortal beauty that had inspired him. The regret of farewell was in his eyes, for his hour of departure was drawing near; soon he would replunge again into the living world, feel its throbbing pulse, breathe its breath, and these solemn heights, these silences, be a thing of the past. Of the past? Was there such a thing as a dead past? Did not yesterday make to-day, and to-day to-morrow? He had wandered here less than two years ago content, secure in his own feeling of irresponsibility; but the human forces around him had woven themselves into his destiny, and the result could never come to an end, only change phase—passion and love and achievement had changed the current of his thought and action, would change them for always.

His work—and the grave intensity of his look deepened to profound gladness—his work was well done, it would live longer than he himself. He knew that. It was the first time the exacting creative spirit had been satisfied. His mind flew back to that first talk with Marvel: her suggestion of the Creator as an unappreciated Artist. He paused again and let his eyes range over the matchless panorama of colour and form, and smiled.

"And God *saw* that it was good," he quoted, "and was satisfied in His work," he added.

He sauntered on again slowly, over the soft bracken and grass, drawing his wide-awake over his eyes to screen them from the dazzle of the afternoon sun, and in the slumberous quiet he heard only his own thoughts. One question must be answered before he went—not by himself, by Cordelia. He never asked himself whether he loved her. It seemed to him that his being had been merged in hers from the first sound of her voice; that he had been waiting for her all his life. He was conscious of nothing new and strange—only an old want satisfied. He had hemmed his love round with sacred silence while it took shape and form; hitherto he had been his own master, shaping his own course, willing each separate act, gauging the possibilities of circumstance, selecting, rejecting with one definite clear-eyed purpose—the triumph of his art; but self-sufficiency had fallen from him. He had succumbed, and henceforth his art must succumb to this new adoration. He had lingered with it in ecstasy and humility—and now? Should he be cast back upon darkness and nothingness?

Unconsciously he had strolled to the dell where he and Max had first met by the little waterfall, almost two years ago, and the young explorer's friendship had promised to meet the demand he made upon it. He thought now with a sigh that his strong man Kwasind's first reluctance to yield had seemed prophetically to sense the wrong he should one day un-

consciously do him. He turned the screen made by shrubs, and there was Kwasind, the vision of his waking thoughts, leaning against the red-brown rock just beyond reach of the flashing water, his arms folded over his breast, his head slightly raised, as if listening to the music he loved, the music of streams, for a tender smile lingered on his lips. On a stone near sat Marvel, dressed in one of her old favourite dresses of blue, with vivid touches of scarlet. She was slightly bending forward, her hands loosely clasped on her knees, her dark mournful eyes fixed upon Max's face as though his rapt expression pleased and absorbed her. Wynn's pulses quickened. The noise of the water had covered the light sound of his footsteps over the grass, and for an undisturbed moment he looked eagerly. In this unconscious, unrehearsed scene, as he stood regarding the two striking figures that gave a human interest to a scene that stretched out and about and beyond them, in strength and power, he got a glimpse of what he hungered for, their peace, and which meant more to him just now than the panorama of Nature's loveliness. It was only a momentary glance, then he went forward quickly. Marvel sprang from her low seat, the truant blood surging to her face.

"Wynn!" she cried, the old name slipping out in her startled astonishment.

"Yes," he answered, his agitation scarcely less than her own, uncovering his head with one hand, while he

held out the other, a mute entreaty in his eyes that urged—"Take it."

"I finished work early, and strolled unconsciously, and here I am. And I am glad to have met you, Mrs. Hawthorne, and Max, for I return to England very shortly, and before I go I want you both to visit my studio—" "and see my pictures," he had almost added, when the sight of Max's drooping lids checked him.

He was flurried and nervous, quite unlike the old cynical self-possessed manner that had aggravated Marvel of old. But she, quicker to recover her composure than he, helped him out, her own quiet tones sounding strangely in her ears. "May I see your pictures? You have painted Cordelia, have you not?" The sweet gravity of her manner further restored his composure.

"Miss Grey has permitted me that honour," he answered.

Marvel's eyes dwelt for a moment on his, then turned to Max, who stood near. His brow had contracted at the sound of Wynn's voice, but cleared again magically at the mention of Cordelia's name. Had something in Wynn's voice betrayed his secret? Marvel's bright colour faded, she drew a little back, pressing against the side of her husband; he threw his arm about her shoulders half protectingly, half as though in habit.

"If I had my old eyes I would come," he said in a low voice.

Marvel started; her glance and Wynn's met involuntarily. It was the first time that Max had ever referred to his loss, so careful had he been not to seem to reproach her father; but that involuntary cry was enough to tell both his companions how he yearned to see his wife's face.

Wynn plunged into talk, and gave Max a description of the two pictures, or a sketch rather of the idea; but in a restrained fashion, for he was an honest man in a dishonest position, and out of the pity and remorse and the new tenderness that seemed to have invaded his whole nature he detected himself trying to dispossess Max's mind of any lurking idea of what Marvel's picture might mean, and fill it with a new thought—that of Cordelia. He grew pale as he struggled with the situation. Whether Marvel was despising him, or even heard this verbal abandonment of her, he could not guess by any sign she made. She led Max carefully, even tenderly; and when she glanced up it was into his face, never beyond it. Where their roads crossed they stopped; and Wynn, carried away by the hope that was in him, that the granite face might soften and the iron will relax, urged once more that Max would listen and place himself unreservedly in the hands of an oculist. But although Max's voice faltered, he refused.

"I 'll trust to time and God's help," he responded.

"I shall expect you at the studio at five, then, Mrs. Hawthorne. Miss Grey will be there to meet you," he said, and lifting his cap hastily turned away. He was baffled and angry. "Ignorance! folly!" he muttered. "God's help, forsooth! There are no miracles except through science. What he means is, he 'll not be helped by the devil—he 's not sure yet whether I 'm false friend or true. Ah well!" But the weight grew too heavy for thinking, and he bustled about, preparing the studio for his reception.

Later, Marvel walked swiftly through the twilight; the lighted roof that had been her beacon of other days shining through the trees. She knew what she should see: the flowers, and palms, and softly glowing lamps, and gleams of white marble in the luminous dusk—and another woman enthroned where she had never reigned! And this was the last time; they should not meet again. She was glad. The peace of the past eighteen months had been like the peace after a storm; this afternoon's encounter had ruffled it. But she had longed to see the picture that had cost her so dear; had feared she might never see it. Now, when she stood outside the dividing wall, her heart beat cruelly. Wynn guided her gently across the room, and led her to a sofa. He felt how cold the little hand was, nor could he ignore the trouble in the beautiful face, into which he looked with no less disturbance in his own. He walked back to the

door, locked it, drew the dividing curtain between the two apartments of the studio yet closer than they had been drawn, then came back and looked gravely down at the trembling girl.

"I am thankful for these few moments, Marvel; it was good of you to come," he began. "I have been battling with doubt, child—doubt as to your happiness, doubt as to whether I am free as an honest man."

She looked at him almost wonderingly, feeling his agitation. "Free? You have been free all along!" she replied, as though not understanding his meaning.

He sat down beside her and took one of her hands. "You have claims which I could not ignore," he proceeded. "I vowed my life to you, to you alone, and although you made it impossible for me to put my intentions into effect, I cannot feel wholly absolved until I hear you say that after deliberate thought you have forgiven me."

"Yes," she answered, and her hand shook in his. "Yes, I have, Wynn. I thought you understood?"

She looked at him with imploring eyes, as though asking him not to try her beyond endurance. He slipped down on his knees, and held both her hands in a tight clasp. His lips quivered, and his voice shook.

"See, girl," he stammered, "I am where no man should be—at a woman's feet in remorse. I would give all that I shall win because of you, give doubly, if I could undo the hurt that I feel I have done you,

although I know that you have forgiven me, my generous girl! But through all these months to have you here in trouble beside me, and not be allowed to help, has been misery. I have wanted so terribly sometimes to tell you how beaten I have been."

Their faces were on a level, his hands were still holding hers, and his grey eyes were searching her dark ones.

"You are free for me, Wynn, free to marry Cordelia," she said huskily.

He drew in his breath. "Swear, is there no reason, no suspicion, objection, in your mind why I should not? If there is I will be bound to you for life, free from obligation, so that should circumstances arise I shall be at liberty to defend you."

His voice faltered, his face was tense and drawn, awaiting her answer, but his keen gaze never flinched.

"I have no claim on you, except that I loved you—once," she said, and saw the life and light that leapt to his eyes. He rose, and stooping down took her face in his hands, and holding it so for a moment, looked earnestly at it, then, bending, kissed her gravely on the forehead, and turned to open the door to Cordelia.

With nerves vibrating still to his touch, like one stupefied, Marvel only half realised the situation. The gulf between herself and Wynn—their separateness—seemed to have been bridged over; his soft, rich voice, his moving face, his pleading, his new tenderness, made

her helpless. It was cruel—she should not have come! Rising, she moved across the room to the standard lamp and set her back against it; and the warm light softened the haggard lines of her face and shone on the bronze of her abundant hair. She looked so beautiful that Cordelia, as she entered, was almost startled. Maternity, and acquaintance with grief, had spiritualised the face of the girl, and the scene through which she had just passed had cast its emotional spell, so that as Cordelia advanced with outstretched hand she felt almost a sense of shock. There was an electric feeling in the air, charged with the magnetism of the occupants of the apartment. She glanced from Marvel to Wynn, then back again to Marvel steadily, who had noted that the fair face had paled a little, and that the musical voice somewhat faltered.

"I am glad to see thee, Marvel. How well thou art looking!" Was she poisoning the moment to her? Marvel wondered, and though she could generously forgive the man his wrong against her, she could not forego the retaliation for that hour of agonising jealousy Cordelia had inflicted upon her in this very room. She had been crushed then. But there was no surrender to the other woman now in her mind and manner. She felt herself her equal, for had she not resigned, renounced, for her and the sake of the man they both loved? For that Cordelia loved Wynn, Marvel did not doubt.

"And would she do more than give her life for his sake?" she asked herself. And before Cordelia possessed a thought of his he had belonged to her.

Oddly enough, it was Marvel who presided over the tea-table. There was no deliberate intention in the act, but she sank into her old place without a thought, and her manner was excellent. How she had improved! Wynn thought, and by reason of his gratitude and knowledge of her sacrifice, and in happiness of absolution, he was deferential, almost reverent in his bearing towards her, responding to her changing mood, grave to meet her gravity, smiles to her smiles.

Was Cordelia suffering? Marvel had managed to exclude her from the conversation. But the passionless face did not say. Wynn stole an occasional glance at her and tugged his moustache with a movement that Marvel knew meant anxiety; but she did not deter. She made no mention of her husband or child, but linked herself to Wynn in past scenes. At length a feeling of compunction smote Marvel, and as they rose she shot a quick glance at the delicate æsthetic face. The light fell on the white-habited figure as they moved together where Wynn led, and Marvel fancied that Cordelia's gown hung more loosely about her; but the classical head, crowned by its golden coil, was held in serene dignity and grace.

"I don't care!" thought Marvel passionately.

" Has n't she made me suffer all through, has n't she got the best of it—birth, culture, him ? "

Even as she excused herself in thought, Cordelia put out her hand sideways, and gave Marvel's a reassuring pressure, as though she had guessed her tumult, and said " Peace."

Wynn drew back the heavy curtains with shaking hands, and in a flood of light revealed two life-size canvases, side by side. Marvel, with a low cry, clutched at Cordelia's hand, as woman instinctively clutches at woman at the unveiling of her sin. For a few seconds her senses reeled, a mist swam before her eyes, then out of the mist, growing more and more distinct, she faced herself. Her breath came in laboured gasps, a crimson tide of beautiful colour dyed face and neck. She held Cordelia's hand in a grasp that must have hurt, and trembled so that Wynn, watching, thought she would have fallen.

His delicate nostrils were quivering, his face had whitened, he seemed scarce to breathe, as his eyes, bright with suppressed excitement, moved from the face of one woman to the other. It was a tremendous moment to him ; how should he be judged ? What would his creation stand for ?

Both faces were rapt, the women had forgotten each other, forgotten him in his work ! Cordelia, like a statue in marble, her brilliant eyes widening, made no movement, except that of glance from canvas back to

canvas. Marvel let go Cordelia's hand, and joining her own, moved a step nearer to the haunting, beautiful creature that seemed to be coming towards her through the enveloping mountain mists, with sorrow and courage and conflict in her eyes. Wynn had ratified his promise; he had idealised and spiritualised. She put out her hand as though to lift a tress of the bronze mantle of hair that fell about the gleaming shoulders. The painter had done what he had hoped, suggested the bewildering distances, and on that rugged mountain-top, shrouded in cloud, the Spirit of Storm looked as though she had lost her way among the snow-peaks.

"You beautiful, sorrowful creature!"

It was Cordelia's caressing voice that broke the spell. Marvel started. Her rival's eyes were fixed upon *the Spirit of Storm* and then Marvel remembered, and moved to the other canvas.

Her first sensation was one of intoxicating delight. There in the luminous summer night stood a girl, white-robed, her loosened golden hair falling to her knees, her hands full of eidelweiss, her eyes bright as the stars that gleamed above the purple and white of the snow-crowned peaks. The silver of waterfall glanced through white, curling vapours; pale, night-tinted flora glowed in half-colours in the niches of the scintillating rock; the magic and sheen of a summer night on the moonlit mountains wooed and dazzled the

eyes. But it was the girl's face that drew, and held, and riveted—peace, deep and profound, illumined it, exaltation shone through its hint of knowledge and sorrow and conflict.

Marvel saw and understood. She read the happiness upon the living woman's face, and realised that, let come what may, *this* would be enough. To have been the soul of the man's soul would more than satisfy, would crown her ; to have been his growth, his enrichment, was to her to have amply lived.

No wonder she could afford to pity the girl who had given herself in vain ! Again she looked at Cordelia, bitterness and yearning in her glance. How absolutely that gentle, austere girl had wrenched the position from her, and enthralled the soul inaccessible to her !

Wynn stood motionless, his deep-set eyes, fixed upon the fair, pure face, telling his own passionate story, seeking confirmation of his hope.

How truly she had been right! she told herself, when she was outside in the darkness. Wynn had rejected her from the beginning. She had been deceived only by her own passion, but with clearer vision she had cut his chains. Max's love and his need of her had redeemed her action from wantonness.

She could only blindly follow instinct—education and experience had been limited—but she groped for the light, hungering, too, with woman's need, for her small world set apart, where the activities of mind and

heart could find scope. The light of the cottage window warmed her chilled blood with new zest and hope. Never had it stirred such emotion in her. There—there was her sphere, her happiness, because of her necessity. Max and her boy both needed her. She had forgotten them this afternoon, only this once, under that fatal spell! Never any more—never any more!

She ascended the steps and opened the kitchen door. The old familiar room looked its cosiest in lamp and firelight. The pewter and delf glinted on the dresser, and where the light was strongest sat Max in knickerbocker suit, his splendid limbs emphasised in their strength by the tiny child that slept in the shelter of his arm. He turned his head as Marvel entered, and over the sightless face a light spread.

"You 've come," he said.

She slipped down on her knees beside him, and his hand strayed to her hair.

"Yes," she said, "I 've come. And I 'm glad to get back. Do you miss me when I leave you?"

Her hungry heart clamoured for assurance that to this life she had meaning, that here she had not failed.

"Miss you?" he murmured brokenly. "You have always been life's light to me."

He rested his cheek upon her hair and drew her closer, his chest heaving. Her changed tone had brought unaccustomed words to his tongue. What he

had feared, what dreaded, she did not know. The deepening thought that she held herself aloof while she gave her service had corroded; that she but tried to expiate the wrong her father had done him. Was she, like her grandfather, serving sentence with her heart breaking for liberty?

Her manner brought a smile to his lips and hope to his heart.

The child stirred and cried, and Marvel gathered the soft little body into her arms, and seating herself on her low rocker by the hearth, crooned softly her mother-nonsense. Eyes and smile were very tender as she looked down. The child would bind them, would draw cords of mutual affection and interest about them. The little upturned face upon her knee smiled in response. Suddenly the words were frozen on her lips, a spasm of fear contracted her heart and pinched her features. She turned the child's face to the light and bent her own close over it, searching, examining, till at length her frightened gaze fastened upon the grey eyes looking in innocent wonder into her own.

"My God! no, no!" was her breathless moan. "O my God, no!"

CHAPTER XX

"AND DID SHE LOVE HIM? WHAT IF SHE DID NOT?"

IT was noon on the following day. Cordelia tied her serge sun-bonnet over her head, and went out in search of her father, who was sketching somewhere near. The natural avenue of giant trees, into which she turned, was aromatic with odours of bush and earth. The great evergreens were deepening their tints to darker green, but wild vines still flowered round the lower stems. So closely did the branches lace and interlace overhead that only in patches the blue sky was visible, shining between; and the sunlight, filtered between the leaf-curtain, cast a luminous green light that shone with the brilliance of a transformation scene, giving distinctness to every gnarled stem and twisted tree-trunk, and making the white-habited girl look almost ethereal in her beauty.

Over the serenity of Cordelia's face there passed a ripple of emotion, as, lifting her eyes, she saw Wynn advancing along the mossy path, with a quick, im-

patient, soundless step. The clear eyes looked startled, her fair face flushed, then grew pale; she hesitated momentarily, as though in doubt whether to proceed or turn, then, bracing to meet his overpowering mentality, went forward; but as he eagerly approached she interposed a slight indefinable chill and reserve between his impetuosity, that checked the words upon his lips. They had walked this path so often, and memory had been busy with him.

"Have you ever guessed what this path has meant to me?" he said, in a low tone— "what perfect hours those have been—the most perfect in my life—in which I have enjoyed your friendship?"

His eyes dwelt upon her with humblest worship. Her step had quickened as he spoke; she looked, not at him, but along the avenue to where the luminous shadow opened to the blue and silver of the lake. He spoke like one whose deeper meaning was but half concealed; but, although she listened, she tried to turn his thoughts.

"Mr. Winter," she said quietly, "my father has had news of his sketch of this avenue. It has been purchased at a price so far exceeding the value of his work that—forgive me!—my suspicions are confirmed—you have in part, or wholly, repainted it."

Her compelling eyes were on him; the hot blood rose to his face and forehead at her detection. He had hoped vainly to deceive her, and to deceive the old

man, into the belief that his long-toiled-for hour had come, and that it was merely because of Wynn's negotiations with the dealers a fair price had been received. It had been too hard for him to stand by and guess at privations he was not permitted to see, and watch the exquisite face sharpening in outline. For the first time Cordelia had dropped the "thou" in her intercourse with him, and substituted the formal "you." It put him leagues away.

"Was it kind?" she asked gently, but distinctly, and instead of her bright smile the corners of her mouth trembled.

"Was it unkind?" he urged, look, gesture, tones, protesting. "Miss Grey, Cordelia, was it unkind to give an old man the desire of his heart? and at such small cost—a little touch here and there—nothing, I assure you! May one not be permitted *sometimes* to give pleasure where pleasure has been bestowed? Are you just—pardon me—are you consistent? Your own ethics of life are at variance with this cold creed you present to me. And what, after all, have I conferred? —a stroke or two of a firm hand where an old one trembled."

"The touch of a master-hand!"

She turned her face, and he peered anxiously under the sheltering hood. The shadow of last evening's expression was there, and his heart and hope upraised. He realised in every nerve that he had roughly touched

some delicate, sensitive fibre of this high-strung temperament; that twenty-four hours had locked some portion of her from his reach. Had she sensed that episode in his life which dishonoured his manhood, or had his passion for herself revealed itself and scared her? In all their intercourse, intimate as it had been, no hint by word or look had escaped him—till the passionate hour of yesterday—that she was to him a very real and personal entity. His heart had been overflowing all the morning; he braced himself now for the contest.

"It would be base, treason, not to tell you that every fibre of my heart and brain is strained toward the ideal of your lifting. Am I venturesome to say so much? but speak I must! I am a leper whom you have healed: do not force deeper degradation upon me, and send me away conscious of healing but without an expression of gratitude."

He did not notice that she clasped her hands to quiet their trembling, or that the fairness of her face had deepened to whiteness. She shook her head mutely; but whether to deny her influence in his life or deny his speech he did not wait to consider, and with rapid, broken utterance went on.

"You dawned upon me at a phase—crisis—of my life when its old order—threads—were broken. I was incapable just then of forming any definite plan of action, of any true conception! Pride, arrogance, were reproached by your simple strength."

His voice steadied, he looked her straight in the eyes. "You made it possible for me to face the most difficult task—duty—of my life."

She did not turn away her eyes, but let their light and softness shed themselves into his for a moment.

"Didst thou perform it?" she asked in her most musical tones; and yet there was something in the gentle austerity of her manner that promised no palliation, that hinted "*First be reconciled to thy brother, then leave thy gift upon the altar.*" There was no false sentimentality here; no acceptance of spurious word for deed; no flattered personal sense, that blinded her eyes to justice. Childlike as her spirit was, it was yet strong and inexorable. And as though before a judge, Wynn answered with force and directness:

"I was not permitted. Believe me, there lies the sting, my debt is unpaid."

"The law of retribution will yet make demand," she answered quietly, and a pang contracted Wynn's heart. Was this hour a first instalment? Was one woman denying him because of the other? Hot passionate protest rose within him, the thwarted will was in revolt. For an electric moment Marvel's secret hung in the balance, he almost poured out the story that honour enforced him to keep; the barbarian blood in his veins ran riot, he could have stormed the barred door of this maiden reserve. For what? To make his wound revolting to her senses, or to receive absolution? Abso-

lution! He wanted love—love even with some disdain if need must; yet no—love that could satisfy its highest need in him. Was she blind? Could she not see, or would she not?

Unknown to him she watched the signs of his conflict, a shadow of which passed over her own face. It seemed as though with clairvoyant vision she sighted it, phase by phase, and detected his fight against self-surrender, for into his storm of rebellion she dropped the hint of his highest.

"I do believe of thee that thy greatness will be in thy renunciation."

"Renunciation!" he cried, stung and amazed, turning to face her as she walked, compelling her to stop and answer him. The word burst from him as though its acceptation could find no lodgment in him. "Death is in renunciation—possession is life. You have trained yourself in that cold school of negation, until you deem your natural heritage of love, estate, power, an indulgence of selfishness. Cordelia, live"—his breath came fast, his eyes searched hers as he clasped her hands—"live and bid me live. I love you—I love you, as men love women whose strength demands their strength, whose sweetness soothes the child in them and charms their impatience, and whose goodness inspires to their best manhood. That is how I love you, sweet! I want you for my own. Ah, will you not come to me? Come and rest, dear love, give

me the right to stand between you and every adverse hour."

Her eyes had been fastened by his, the torrent of his words held her in a spell. She released her hands gently, but firmly, although she seemed struggling hard for composure.

"I had not thought that thy wish was for my love," she answered almost despairingly; then added, with simple candour, "until yesterday. But then I knew. For no man could put that look into a woman's face who had not stood to him——"

"For saint!" he interrupted hoarsely.

She wavered for a moment, then went falteringly on: "For his ideal. What his heart saw of his heart's need! Thou didst not paint *me*—thou art deceived. I am no saint. I am a mortal girl, with plain ways, who but catches a glimpse, and that dimly, of near and simple duties. The profundity and depth and intricacies of larger life than this I cannot enter." She waved her hand to the cottage in the woodland. "My duty is here, my place beside the one who hath loved me all his life, and who hath none but me!"

Her self-control increased as she proceeded. The firm, sweet lips closed with a decision that the man of resolution felt powerless to shake. A sick sense of failure, the pain of rejection, paled his cheeks, and across his vision came the pensive, beautiful eyes of Marvel when she had said to him, "You are free."

Free? Was the asceticism of one woman avenging the shame of the other, or was she defending herself against indifference, by presenting consideration of her father as her most sacred obligation?

"You do not answer me!" he urged. "Say that you do not love me and I will plead no more."

A flush overspread her cheeks, lighting the chaste beauty of her face to a womanish charm that made her resistance the harder.

"I have answered thee," she replied, a tinge of haughtiness in the movement with which she raised her head and drew slightly apart.

He pictured that proud head crowned with jewels to match her eyes, the stately grace of the queenly young figure emphasised by silk attire. There would be none to rival her, none! he thought with a man's exultation and tenderness, and joy in the beauty and sweetness of the woman of his love.

"My spirit of peace!" he murmured brokenly. "It is impossible to have known you as I have known you and leave you easily! You have no idle words—forgive me, but are you sure? Cordelia, *are you sure?*" He bent to search her face, and held out an appealing hand. "Quite sure that you are right to bid me leave you? If this is sacrifice—are you not denying an old man a playtime?"

"See!" she interrupted, pointing to a white-haired figure just then visible where they turned a bend in

the avenue. The old artist stood, palette in hand, his enraptured gaze fixed upon the scene before him. The dignity of his attitude, the joy of his expression, gave pathetic and forcible illustration to the daughter's words, "He hath his world—what lacketh he?"

They stood and watched him for a moment, then turned slowly to retrace their way, and the sounds of the autumn noon grew dirge-like to the man who had gained his world and lost his life's soul. The leaves whispered of farewell, the triumphant music of waters mocked him. All that had seemed to him most vital was lifeless without this woman's love. All that had seemed to him most important—fame, distinction, consideration, wealth—this girl, at whose feet he would proudly have laid his honours as tribute, with a pride greater than his own, refused their acceptance. He yearned to bestow lavishly, and none would receive at his hands. A little fear crept into his eyes, his head drooped, and the lines in his face deepened. His mouth felt hot and parched. His student days of poverty were with him again, he felt the old ache and repression, the aloneness. He was once more a castaway. Neither the intellectual nor the material realisation of the old dream of that old time could satisfy this new hunger.

"He lacketh nothing"—Cordelia's voice in its most maddening cadence beat on his brain—"except the faculty, which isolation hath deadened, to live in that

life to which thou goest, and where he would be a figure of pity and scorn. No man noticeth him here; he is like one of the branches of these stately trees, that have been flung down by storm. The one passionate desire of his life hath bred that faith in his achievement which doth stand to him world of all worlds. He is as one who, passing through the valley of the shadow of death, seeth a light ever before him. Here, amid Nature's simplicity, he is neither rebuked nor mocked. I may not desert him. I would not if I could; I could not if I would. Doth that answer thee?"

She turned to him in a glow of spiritual ecstasy, and seeing the drooping head, a quick, pitiful instinct prompted her. She put out her fragile white hand and laid it upon his arm. He drew it under his own, and they walked on a pace or two. It seemed to him that darkness had fallen upon the world. The pain in his face was so great that her curved mouth quivered.

"Look up," she almost whispered. "The day of thy triumph is no hour for thine unthankfulness. A man should not mourn when moments are so few between the realisation of his success."

"Don't mock me!" he said almost harshly, turning sharply round. "This is the day of my defeat. I am not a boy—I know what I want. And I never yet submitted to defeat tamely—I never shall!" His tone and eyes softened, he laid a firm hand upon the hand

that trembled on his arm. "A man has a right to his own dominion, and if your love, Cordelia, is in it, if you belong to me, I shall claim you, dear, in spite of to-day. You may send me from you, but you cannot kill my love. It is yours to reject, if you will, but I belong to you always—always needed you," he went on passionately, not stopping to choose his words, "else why did my whole being vibrate to the first tones of your voice when you bade me seek the light? You banish me now," he proceeded, his voice growing husky. "In the recesses and reserves of your mind you have a doubt of me—deserved! You have set me a lesson in humility—a hard lesson, but I will learn it. One leper in the ten returned!"

"Now thou art angry," she answered gently, and her eyes looked like stars shining softly through a mist. "I act from no caprice, neither do I coquet with thee. My thought hath never wandered along love's path to meet thee; thou hast surprised me by thy protestation and thy demand. I do but seek to help thee to the truth, to sight the heaven for thee, which, seen through the mist of thy spleen, doth look so dim."

He smiled. Her quaint phraseology pleased him. "Tell me what my heaven looks like from your point of view," he said.

She paused for a moment, and sighed, her eyes downcast. She had slipped her hand from his arm, and had lightly clasped both in front of her. Her look

of contemplation was so demurely sweet that he longed to fold her in his arms.

" Nay, but thy mood will not agree. The mountains have cast their glamour on thee, nature appeals to nature, and man's simplicity responds. For the moment love sufficeth thee. But removed from the spell of these solitudes, this phase may pass; thy world—the rightful world which thou hast won—wilt clamour for thee, and thy reason will rise above instinct; then there must be no environments!"

He started; was she using his own first words against him? Her bosom heaved, but the eyes she lifted to his face were clear.

" If I do not love thee," she continued, a little sadly, " I love the best that is in thee, and thou shalt not vow. Thou must go back to thy real life free as though thou hadst not uttered vows to me! Thou art an heir to fame—thou art athirst for it. Drink and be satisfied, and thy name will shine ever brightly in my memory." She smiled enchantingly, and held out both her hands for him to take. " Thou wert a name to me before thou camest; thy name will live to me when thou art gone, Wynn Winter." Her voice took a tone of command, as well as pleading. " A life rises to its crest once, then falls to heaven or hell!"

She stood and watched him very quietly, as he went slowly away, his hands behind his back, his proud

head low. Her eyes followed him till he reached the bend that led to the lake, then turning suddenly, and seeing her standing there, he uncovered his head; she waved her hand to him, and moved slowly away.

CHAPTER XXI

BY THE COACH

SEVEN years had passed over Manapouri since that rosy evening when Marvel had watched for the coach which brought the man who changed the current of her life and thought; five summers had blossomed and faded since the closing of the phase of torture that had left indelible marks on her face and character. But nothing else had changed. This luminous evening might have been that of the past, so like was it; and Marvel stood again on the cottage veranda, her gaze fixed on the roadway under the trees. But she looked as one who did not see; there was no expectation in her face, and no impatience. Standing quite still, she towered in her majestic height like a true daughter of the mountains, alien no longer; one with them, with hint of sear and storm.

Her beauty had not faded, but changed. There was a softer, deeper, sterner expression in the dark eyes that had gazed on pain and seen defeat, and their ex-

pression sank deep into the memory. The curved red mouth drooped; but no hint of fretfulness or impatience marred its beauty; its tenderness matched the eyes. It might have been the face of a beautiful lost spirit—but lost in loving—one whom the narrow limits of personality could not chain. And there was all the pride of a proud race in her bearing—nameless descendant though she was—and the Celtic endurance that can "suffer and be still."

"Mummy!" called a boy's treble from within. "Mummy, I want you."

She started as though the voice recalled her from afar off; and moving slowly, entered the room that had once been her own, but which now was part nursery, part playroom. A boy, dressed in a blue jersey and knickers, which, clinging to the slender, supple little body, showed every quick movement, was standing before a slate propped against the wall, a crayon held daintily between his tiny fingers. Fair waving hair fell uncut upon his shoulders, his features were refined, and his skin in its extreme delicacy, revealing blue veins at the temples, hinted at fragility.

"I want to paint you, Mummy!" said the child, with a hint of impatience in his voice; and he turned a pair of grey eyes upon her with an intent and quizzical look.

"No, darling!" said Marvel. Moving swiftly, and crossing the room, she slipped to her knees, and threw

an arm round the boy. "I wish you would n't! I very much wish you would n't."

Her face was almost on a level with the small face turned to her own. She gently brushed the soft hair from his forehead with her hand. The child smiled to her eyes, gravely sweet.

"Don't you like to be painted?" he asked.

"No," she whispered; "never do it, sweetheart, never!"

"Then I sha'n't," he said emphatically, and sighed in resignation—"not if you don't want me to; but I 'll paint the lake, an' the mountains, an' the flowers, an' the sky, an' the wivers—an' some day I 'll paint all the world!" he added, throwing back his head with a gesture that made her shiver; "and," as an afterthought, "I might paint Farver Max—if you 'd like that!"

Like it! Would it never end—never, never? Was it to be suffered all over again? Would Nature develop the boy after its laws alone—triumph over her again? Could no superhuman effort displace this instinct? As in a vision she saw the sunlit lake, and a boat coming through the light, and heard the tenor voice of the oarsman:

"I mean to rule the earth,
As he the sky;
We really know our worth,
The sun and I."

She rose hastily, and crossed the room in an agitated manner, then returned to where the child stood watching her half wonderingly.

"Paul," she said, in a low, decided tone, "I *command* you—do you understand?—*command* you never to mention your painting to your Father Max. He—he *hates* it. I hate it. You displease and grieve me every time you do it, every time you think of it!"

She would defy this subtle Nemesis, it should not be inevitable. The horror of the past should not rise to destroy the peace she had fought so hard to win for this home.

The baby face paled, lips trembled, big tears sprang, the two little hands hanging helplessly. Mummy was angry. Mummy had never been angry before!

"You *shall* not," she repeated, almost frantically, "*shall* not!" looking down at the boy breathlessly and afraid.

"Am I naughty?" he asked piteously, struggling hard with the tears.

A passionate tide of self-reproach and love swept over her. She stooped, and drew the fair head to her knee. "No, my Paul, you are not naughty, not you—not you, my dearie!"

The soft strains of a violin sounded from the kitchen, and seating herself on a low chair she drew the child to her, and resting her cheek on his soft hair, listened with dreamy eyes. The scene with the lad had shaken

her nerves, she was apprehensive and disquieted. Five years of peace that had deepened into content had passed undisturbed: why might not all the future be as now? She was not altogether separated from happiness. She had emerged from her madness too sane for youth, perhaps; yet, but for that knowledge in her heart of hearts, she would not wish to have anything changed, for Max had found consolation in his blindness. "Oh, *must* he ever know?" she asked, and hungered to keep the knowledge that would crush him. In his blindness he had stumbled past catastrophe. And in her heart was the half-formed thought that destiny, by putting out his sight, had worked him good. If only the child could be bent like the young twig to a form it did not grow.

"Paul," she murmured, "I called you after the name of a strong man—a man who wanted very much to do his own way, and did not, because another way made people happier. He was a very thorough gentleman; and immediately he saw that he had been in the wrong when he believed he was right he did n't do that thing any more."

"What did he do?"

"He first told people of his mistake, and then set about doing other things that he was told, and became a very great and distinguished man."

"Oh!"

This ambiguous history of Saul of Tarsus, afterwards

Paul, seemed to impress his modern namesake. He went out thoughtfully, to consider it on the veranda, while his mother sat thinking. She had concluded at the time of Wynn's departure that Cordelia had refused him. The abruptness of his going, the fact that he had not returned, and that the old artist and his daughter still lived in the same way, all tended to strengthen this belief. Once a package of newspapers had reached her, addressed in Tony's handwriting, all containing criticisms of Wynn's pictures, extolling his genius and the beauty of *A Spirit of Storm*, and the woman's heart had throbbed. All this should have been the heritage of her boy ; would have been had she not tried to put wrong right with ineffectual hands. In her eagerness to put out the fire of a past kindling she had set new fuel ablaze. This afternoon again the natural claim of Paul to the inheritance of his father's genius was bruising her. On what a different path his feet might have trodden but for her !

" Mummy ! " he called gleefully, " come and see the coach. Here it comes. There 's a gentleman on the box-seat. Come, Mummy, see ! "

She walked out mechanically, her eyes partly blinded by the sun-rays, partly by her inward vision. Shading them with her hand she saw the prancing horses, the revolving wheels, the dark-skinned driver, and beside him— With a suppressed cry she took Paul by the

arm and thrust him behind her; then, with rapid movements, pushed him into his room.

"Stay there," she gasped. "Stay there till I call you—and don't speak."

She had not time to analyse her motive, her first instinct was to hide the child. It was a proud, self-possessed woman who met Wynn, with challenge in her eyes. He uncovered his head with gravest courtesy, and she saw with a queer little pang—so contradictory is a woman's heart—that his beautiful hair was grey. His face, too, was thinner than of old, and as he turned it to her she noted that an increasing agitation made speech difficult. There was no passion in her answering gaze; it seemed to him that wife and motherhood became her, while she realised with her old swift intuition that the careless boyhood that had lingered with him till long past boyhood's years was now quite dead. She gave him no opportunity for private speech, but without shrinking, and in the most determined manner, ushered him into the presence of Max. The blind giant sat in the little kitchen by the open door, where the sweet air came in from the lake. His massive dark head and shoulders were silhouetted against the vivid purple background. A beard covered the lower portion of his face, and the hair of his head was thick and long. The eyes that had given the strong face its melancholy were covered by the drooping lids; the old hard lines had smoothed in cheek and

forehead. There were pathos and abandonment in his whole appearance and attitude; the bowed head over the instrument, the strong delicate fingers—grown white in idleness—grasping the bow. He was absorbed, his untrodden mountains making a setting at his back.

"Kwasind."

His bow was suspended. He lifted his chin from his instrument.

"My strong man Kwasind."

The bow fell from the hand that was immediately grasped.

"It is you!"

"Yes, it is I!" answered Wynn, and if ever Max had doubted this man's liking for himself, the tone put doubt to derision.

"It might have been yesterday!" the blind man murmured.

Yesterday? The wife that stood gazing at the two men, from one face to the other, wished that it had been yesterday they had met; and yet she thrilled at their reconciliation, considering the intervening years. Deep in that fatalist sense of hers, all the time, lay the certainty of an all-avenging moment. But, before it came, let the two men believe in the love of the other.

Yesterday? Wynn glanced at Marvel curiously. Was she happy after all? But for him she certainly

would have been; in his darkest moments he had hoped that peace would come. She seemed to him wonderfully changed; tint, and expression, and bearing had softened, mellowed and beautified; and in the erectness of her carriage he read that she had outlived all that had been humiliating to her. He clung to what was visible.

"I am the bearer of important news," said Wynn, after the first emotion had passed and the two men were seated. Marvel stood at the back of her husband's chair; consciously or unconsciously, she had placed Max between herself and Wynn. Wynn looked at her as he spoke; his glance was deprecating and steady, as though he offered the news as an apology for his presence. Both Max and Marvel waited. The blind man put out his hand and touched the violin on the table beside him, as one touches the hand of a tried and trusty friend in time of need or excitement. His sightless face seemed mutely to plead.

"I come from Tony!"

"Ah!"

There was relief in the exclamation which both his listeners made in a breath—both faces lightened and smiled.

"I was commissioned by him to deliver to you certain papers of value." His manner grew hesitating, his voice slightly sad. "Tony is dead—he has left the whole of his property to you, Mrs. Hawthorne."

"Dead! Tony dead?" Her eyes were filled with sudden tears. She did not appear to have heard the latter half of the communication.

"Yes," said Wynn gravely, but speaking more quickly, a subdued eagerness in his manner. "It was only six months ago that I fell in with him again. I happened to find myself near his place in Devon, and well—'for auld lang syne,' looked him up. I found—him depressed and low—'Living is too much in the common wut to be intewesting, don't you know, old chap!' He was standing by a great carved fireplace, in a magnificent old dining-room, as he said it, and looked, as he spoke, into a log fire that burnt on the tiled hearth. 'I always burn wood; it bwings Manapouwi to wemembwance!' he added."

Wynn looked at Marvel meaningly, then at Max; Max was listening intently.

"Please go on," said Marvel, her eyes still swimming.

"'I 've lost my occupation, don't you know!' he informed me. I told him I was unaware to what he referred. 'Taking care of Mrs. Hawthorne's father,' he replied."

Both Marvel and Max listened now with strained attention. The name had been a dead name between them, and Wynn, who had evidently been put in possession of full facts, found a difficulty in proceeding.

"When Tony left here he overtook Mr. Meredith—

came across him in Dunedin. He told me that you once asked him to keep an eye on him——"

"Yes," said Marvel quietly.

"And he—well," proceeded Wynn, "he continued doing so while Mr. Meredith lived!"

"Frank Meredith is dead, then?"

It was Max who spoke, and the question seemed to choke him. Marvel had paled, the hand on her husband's chair trembled as she clutched it. Her eyes asked Wynn a question which he answered.

"Tony had given him a home—made a sort of companion of him, in fact, and he bade me tell you, Mrs. Hawthorne, that your father had rewarded his trust. That was the word—rewarded."

The dark brows of the blind man were drawn together ominously, and Wynn hurried on, in answer to a sign from Marvel, who clearly wanted to hear more.

"I have implicit faith in Tony's statement—it pleased him so—he was not using the words as a convention. It is a literal truth that between the two men there had been a tie which the lad evidently missed. Tony had a large protective instinct, and I was surprised to find how admirably he had fathered the whole of his tenants; and it was, he assured me, because he knew positively that you would mother them, and Max carry out the instructions he has left, that he has bequeathed his fortune as he has done. He has appointed Max as

steward—his instructions are very explicit—£2000 per annum is to be paid from the estate, in recognition of the service demanded, and to one of Max's blood the appointment is to be offered for ever ! ''

What meaning there was in the words ! Max was a proud man—and he was to *earn* his bread.

He was deadly pale, his face was quivering painfully, and over him hung Marvel, whom Wynn could not quite analyse. Strong forces were at work, controlled by her will, but the woman in her had been expanding under her stress of feeling. She laid her hand on her husband's shoulder.

'' Dear,'' she said, '' you will do your duty ! ''

Exquisite ! thought Wynn. It would rend Max asunder to feel that he was dependent—it had been breaking his heart to face the long dark helplessness ! How had this girl come by that finer education, that look of strength and character ? There was a moment's silence, then Wynn proceeded.

'' Tony was coming himself to tell you of your father, Mrs. Hawthorne, and to plead where I had failed.'' His voice took a subtle delicate change. '' Max,'' he said, for the first time addressing him personally, '' your usefulness would be restricted else—one of Tony's instructions was that I bring a famous oculist to visit you ; he came by the coach ! ''

Marvel's face was bent over her husband's head. Wynn could not see it, but he saw the man's hand

reach for hers, and his imprisoned in it; and his heart rose in confidence, his tone grew wondrously gentle as he went on.

"But Tony did not come, as you know. He had no physical stamina, and a chill, caught while he was making his preparations, ended in pneumonia——"

"Was he alone?"

It was Max who asked; Marvel's face was still hidden.

"I was there!" answered Wynn, rising, "and after all—don't be sad, Mrs. Hawthorne—after all, he *had* his desire—he attained his ideal—and there was no anti-climax—he lived and died out of the common rut!"

Marvel lifted her head and looked at him as one stupefied. "Does the past poison even the thought of future prosperity for her?" asked Wynn of himself, perplexed; or had she, as yet, only half realised the situation? It had been the hope—next dearest to that of winning Cordelia—to see Marvel smile, that had lived with him all through his long journey. Once she had so passionately desired to see the world, and this action of Tony's had lifted a load off his mind. Her intimacy with the lad had not been of the kind to bring, at news of his death, those shadows about her eyes, and draw the sweet mouth into lines of pain. He had looked forward, in imagination, for months to this hour, counted the hours, rehearsed the scene—how differently! Her rigid silence told him that his news

had fallen short. In a sort of desperation he tried to rouse her, and sketched for her the last scene of her dead friend. Max drew his breath as the graphic scene concluded: "He lay in the great bed in the great bed-chamber, and looked like a child almost, among the pillows. 'Tell her,' he said, 'that my joy lies in the hope that she and her children will live in this old house. It was, and is, my dearest wish!'"

He seemed to be pleading a cause with her over a gulf. Would this miserable separateness never be bridged? He loitered, loth to go without one spontaneous, free word. He was still wanting in the hardihood that could take his own joy and leave her out in the cold.

When they were alone, Max drew Marvel into his arms.

"It 's good news for you, dear!" he said gently, stroking her hair. "I 'd rather no man, except myself, had had a hand in your prosperity; but none can expect all things to his wish. I longed for you to wife— I 've had my will, and when I 've seen the face of Paul there 'll be little left to mend!"

When the night had fallen, Marvel looked out where the light of the studio had been wont to shine. No, she had not been wholly unhappy since that old time; something had vanished with the years, but love of husband and child had taken the place of that turbulent passion which had conquered her. But the bitter self-

torturing was at an end. She knew that the hour of revelation was at hand, that which had been hidden would be forced to the light. Her sin had waited the fulness of time for its birth of consequence. She had been resting over a slumbering volcano, standing on the verge of a precipice. She braced herself with an agony to endure, not resist. When she turned from the window she had decided that Wynn must be told.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ONE IN TEN

CORDELIA walked westward in the light of the setting sun, which, breaking at intervals between the giant boughs of the avenue, fell in crimson patches on the soft moss-carpet over which she passed, staining the white habit and hood to deep red, which faded to white again as she moved with easy and languid grace along the path, her eyes now downcast, now raised to feast upon the rich colour. There was a sweet, deep calm upon her face; her eyes were lit with that spirit light which radiates from some deep source apart from the cry and the noise of sense. She looked as one whose sweetness and strength, ripening in remoteness, felt no need of audience—was sufficient unto itself.

"My Lady's Walk," her father had called the avenue, because of her fondness for it. She knew it in every aspect: when, in storm-battle, its branches clasped their arms; when, in the autumn gloaming,

the wild wind fiends shrieked among its shadows ; in its garment of snow, when old landmarks were obliterated, and in its gala dress of gold and crimson and green. For this was her world, where she had lived ; where also she had dreamed, waited and grown tired, and refreshed again. She had learned from Nature's wisdom how to let go and how to renew.

Lifting her head with its old dignity, her eyes fell upon a figure that stood out distinctly against the dazzling patch of lake. It came on, grew larger, its outlines blurred in the deep shadows, to be thrown into convincing distinctness in the nearer light. The easy swinging walk, the poise of the head, put back time from the woman's memory. She stood amazed.

" Dear Quakeress," Wynn murmured, enthralled. Eyes and the heart of him were feasting on the vision of her loveliness and gladness.

" Thou hast returned ? " she said tremulously, holding her two hands for him to take ; and as he bent over them reverently, with head uncovered, her eyes went to his whitening hair. " And thou art tired ! " she added.

He stood upright at that, not loosening his clasp. " Very tired. And you ? " He searched her face for trace of unrest. " Weariness cannot reach you where you dwell ! " He dropped her hands and sighed. She turned to walk, and he beside her, his gaze lingering over the fair face and form, so dearly familiar to his

memory; yet at the new sight of her revealed new beauty, the old charm cast fresh spell. Beholding her once more, he marvelled at nothing, except that he had left her.

"It was a mistake to go!" he blurted out hotly, resenting the cheating of the years.

"But now thou art returned!"

The musical accents fell gently into his resentment. It was as though to her all fulness and satisfaction lay there.

"Thou didst ever misname things," she proceeded, patting his arm to soften her chiding with assurance of sympathy, "didst ever contend with restraint and kick against the pricks. Hast thou not learned with all thy knowledge that strong forces are in the silences —strong influences in the spaces? And in the long watches of life—ah! dearest friend, hath nothing reached thee that hath enriched thee? Hast thou heard nothing when thou didst deem thyself alone?" She turned her eyes to his.

"You," he answered, "I heard you!"

She looked away. They went a pace or two, then he burst out again.

"Five years have been lost to me!"

"Thou hast thine old heat," she responded, looking at him in questioning concern.

"And thou thine own sweet witchery!" he answered brokenly, lifting her soft white hand to his arm. "Let

it rest there," he pleaded humbly. "My heart is full at sight of you. I want to talk with you without reserve; yet words desecrate my meaning."

"Then why speak?"

"Why does the melted snow pour into the gorges, and the full streams rush to the sea? Let the sun that thawed the ice answer—as love must be responsible for my speech. Silence has meaning, waste places peace, but I swear by all the winds that lash to fury all the seas that I would rather suffer with you than enjoy the 'peace be still' of loveless life!" His hand closed on her own. "You *must* hear me, you must," he added passionately, "and then when I have spoken you shall silence me for ever—if you will!"

His voice shook; the arm beneath her hand tightened as though his will belied his words: that come what may he would hold her to him.

"The last time we walked here," he proceeded, "you bade me leave you, you denied me, humbled me. When I passed through yonder opening I felt as though I had passed through the everlasting gate—on the wrong side. It seemed to me that life immortal was a fable. The half-promise of bliss I would have bartered for one kiss of you. Then I reflected how little I had done, how little won—and add to that how little I had borne. What claim had I?"

"Didst thou think," she answered with earnest eyes, and pressure upon his arm, "that I did pit thy

performance against thy love, or weigh any *pros* and *cons* for thee, except my fear that, carried by thy swift desire, thou wouldst launch thyself upon an untried sea to thy disaster? I had a fear for thee—that having lost thy compass, thou hadst mistaken an alien port for home."

"Cordelia, if you knew! How can I make you understand the waste of that dark deep which separated us? You cannot know. Here, in this calm haven, how should you know that thought of good wars with daily deed? Sheltered, untempted, your pure thought but an uncontested bridge to your pure act!"

"A peaceful destiny," she said quietly.

He turned and looked hard at her. The sun had sunk in the grey twilight; her face looked *spirituelle*, spirit-like. Not to feel, not to do: was such a *rôle* possible to her? The strenuous, sweet look of strength rebuked him. How could he know what battles she had fought, what victories won? His clamouring and protest seemed vulgar.

"Tell on," she said, when the silence hurt.

"Lord God, I love you—what more is there to say?" he answered brokenly.

"Add," she said, "unto thy love its mate—I love thee too. Nay, do not speak; if it hadst been thy will to leave me, I yet had joy in mine own fidelity. Born in my mother's house, truth sufficeth me. Dear heart," she added caressingly, "thou art a very child."

She lifted her luminous soft eyes to meet his wondering gaze. "Didst thou think that thou hadst any coldness in me to warm, any rebellion to quell? I am faithful. When thou didst leave me in this lonely valley, thou didst leave me yoked unto thee. Thou art above me—greater, wiser; yet thou canst not teach me love's simplicity—that loving, it loveth for weal or woe!"

He was white and trembling; turned to speak, broke down, and gathered her into his arms. When his pulse was calmer, he drew the dear face to his shoulder.

"Why did I ever let you persuade me to leave you? I will never leave you again—never. Did you think to tame me?" He put his hand that shook with contact with her under her chin, and turned her face to the fading light, so the better to read the meaning in her eyes. "Could you not understand that my life was imprisoned here with you?"

She lifted her head, and laid a caressing hand upon his neck.

"There could have been no undoing for thee. I could not have thee glide lightly into that which would have been irreparable. And if thou hadst deceived thyself"—she hid her face for a moment on his shoulder, then proceeded softly, "if I had given myself for an illusion——"

"Don't," he said brokenly. "There was some doubt of me at the back of your mind; there is still.

And I would to God," he added passionately, "that I could tell you all. But this much I can say, I have never *loved* any woman but you; never felt that any other would enrich and ennoble my life." Cordelia felt his arm lifting, drawing her to him. "My queen," he almost whispered, "I would kneel to you, but that I have already knelt to a woman—in remorse. I am as far beneath your thought of me as this world is beneath high heaven." His trembling lips touched hers.

She turned to him in the shadow; he could not see her face, but he felt the touch of her hands.

"Thou dost not know what are my thoughts of thee," she answered gently. "Thou art a stalwart man, but to-day I love thee best because of thine insufficiency unto thyself. Come now, tell me of thine honours."

"That you may love me less?"

"That I may pride in thy manhood—which any woman would do who did not love thee! I have a double share of joy, that I may pride and love both."

They were walking on again; he put out a quick hand and imprisoned hers.

"Which are you," he cried passionately, "spirit or woman?"

"Indeed," she answered, "thou dost err to put the woman last. In my flesh are sinews which the soul lacketh. It enthralleth the spirit to aspire—what stress

and strain the flesh doth suffer to ascend! I am that weakest and that strongest thing—a woman. And because of that, I glory in thee, a man. Dearer to me than thy love for me is thy work's excellence. A man may be nothing that his genius may be everything—that was my dream of thee!"

"Ah! dear love," he answered humbly, "I am not worthy of this precious gift, your perfect comprehension—and yet I have need of it. I did win," he proceeded. She could not see his face, but the tones of his voice were so humble, he might have said, "I failed." "But what was that? A trained and steady hand, a cultivated eye. And yet," he proceeded, with vigour entering into expression and manner, "why should I pretend I am not glad? I *am* glad"—he raised his head—"unfeignedly glad."

"A man's work liveth after him!" murmured the soft voice at his side.

"Ah! how you understand!" he responded eagerly. "This personality may die a thousand ignominious deaths, fail utterly, but what is over, underneath, may excel. That finer instinct which perceives, which raises the ideal, unsullied by personal experience, is not this the mission of the artist? Cordelia, *I myself* have smirched my own manhood, but my art? God knows! For my art's sake I have suffered, hungered, sinned, to present it as near perfection as this clumsy hand of mine could execute. I love life—I have died

daily that my work may live. I hate sacrifice—I have yielded my will; bound myself to a stake to save the soul of my art! The slow fires have scorched me, scarred me, Cordelia." The last word was an intercession. His hand sought hers.

"Comfort thee," she said. "In thine own body thou must pay the debt of the deeds of the body—thy genius is pure."

The great avenue was lightening; silver-white and deep black contrasted, and the man and woman were visible to each other again by the sheen of the risen moon. Silence had fallen between them; commonplaces had no room in their full hearts. They went along hand in hand, absorbed in thought. Her suggestion startled him. In the absorption of his passion that indefinable sense of bondage to his past had escaped him. With his new joy all things had been born anew. With the consciousness of her love all fear had escaped him. In the triumph of his passion it had seemed that he had conquered all circumstances; yet the words on the lips that had sealed his bliss sounded like prophecy. It jarred his fine sense that a shadow, the shadow of his sin, should fall between in the most perfect hour of his companionship with her. Could it touch her? No, no—not that! His nostrils dilated, his lips quivered. His sense of honesty rebelled; his conscience suffered that there must be division between them—division of knowledge. If he

could only tell her! It was intolerable to feel her nearness, and shut her off from any thought of his.

"Where wert thou?" she asked, amazed at his expression of aloofness.

"In hell!" he answered with an effort.

"May thy sojourn profit thee! But come, thou hast not told me what the world hath done to thee that thou hast found it wearisome?"

"It wanted you!"

"Five years of thine could not be years of barrenness."

She spoke with dignity and authority; how she lifted, how held him to his best! He realised with a quick, passionate throb of exultation that to her he must be something to admire as well as love.

"I was at war with life; do not reproach me with ingratitude. The heaven of my long toil and enterprise was won as I conceived it—without you. Someone has written that destiny has two ways of crushing—one way by denying, the other by granting our desires. Mine were granted, but I, myself, was alone."

Involuntarily he drew her closer to him, and the instinctive movement told more than his words; his voice was stifled. She realised that he had not simply abstained, that his delay had been struggle.

"But there," he concluded, that hint of weariness in his voice which she had marked, "what more is there to say? Have you not sufficiently tested yourself and

me, guarded me with all possible care against all possible contingencies? Ah, love, let there be no more restraints, no more denials." He turned her face again where the light of the moon fell full upon it. Her eyes met his with the answer that he craved: her struggle was over.

"Dear heart, I love thee," she said softly.

"Swear to me!" he demanded, his passion chafing against the calm serenity and strength writ all over face and brow, and smiling on him from eyes and lips. "Swear that nothing shall separate us again, nothing save death."

"Nay," she answered, her sweet tones trembling on her candid lips, "that I may not do; but I may ever love thee. That I can vow with certainty."

He lifted one of the heavy plaits of her hair, and let it fall almost with a gesture of despair. Her thoughts were almost legible in her beaming look. The muscles of his face showed his torment. "You may ever love me, yet perchance send me in heart-hunger and nakedness back into the cauldron," he said hoarsely.

"If holding thee were opposed to right!" she answered, with simple sincerity. "Nevertheless, I have no such scruples. But there should be no dissimulation between thee and me. If love be opposed to truth it cannot live. That which shameth love killeth it."

"Who taught you all this wisdom?" he asked as he held her from him. Suddenly his manner changed.

"I need you," he murmured. "Dear one, I can wait no longer; even the weeks between now and the day when you belong to me absolutely will seem interminable. *I* shall be your *duty* then, sweet Quakeress. Example, tradition, will all be on my side!" He laughed softly. "You can't leave me then, without being wicked. You will struggle till your duty and love are one."

They walked on silently for a moment, then he said humbly: "I knew that sometime, somewhere, I should find you, and that you would come to me. And one day we shall know each other so thoroughly that nothing can pull you away, even for a moment. For this I can wait, I am willing. Meantime no word shall fall from my lips against any decree of yours, unless you push me again into the silence—alone."

His mind fell back to the years away from her, and into the pause her voice presently fell.

"I cannot know thy struggle: it cannot be told, I feel sure; but I want to assure thee that my heart has not one moment of doubt or fault-finding. I *know* thou hast done the best that as yet has been possible to thee, and that it is a brave, loyal best. But, dear friend, there is something untold. I do not ask what, and shall not; but my heart cries out to thee to help thee, and to keep thee near me if that be possible, for indeed I need thee as thou dost need me—and my father a son."

She turned and placed her hand in his, making her vow, her face radiant and tender. "My husband, thy people shall be my people, thy joys and sorrows mine. I could not give thee the pillow of my heart for an impulse of thy youth, lest it pulsed the blood for weak pretence and put us both to blame. But in this love of thy manhood thou hast betrayed no holier trust—and I love thee, even as thou lovest me."

CHAPTER XXIII

IN A LOOKING-GLASS

HEAVY rain detained Wynn for several days, but with its abatement he recrossed the lake for news of Max: he and Cordelia were alike anxious. In the man's state of mind foreboding could not live; chaos had been reduced to order, and the promise of joy that he himself was realising must have existence in the sphere of his friends, to his optimistic reasoning at least.

Vulnerable at this point still, he was accessible to the pain that touched the woman whose generous trust had enriched him, to her own impoverishment. At bottom it may have been self-love, offended dignity, or wounded pride; it may have been that the unreasoning man in him was too large to rejoice absolutely, while the woman suffered whom his first words, first impulses, had linked to himself as wife. There was spontaneity in this part of him that had drifted out of his reach, *which was* not infidelity to Cordelia, but loyalty to

Marvel, and as he tussled with the breeze and the waves, he was compelled to admit that, whatever the reason, he could not act or feel as though Marvel had never been.

He came to the landing-place near his old broken-down studio; a tangle of undergrowth had climbed and concealed the walls; vines and clematis were blossoming purple and white where the roof had been. A rush of passionate memories held him fast. Here he had chosen types, here fate had woven destinies. The force of life intertwining itself with very simple facts had created situations, developed character, led to an inevitable *dénouement*, upon which he now stood on the brink.

He turned, and faced a small replica of himself, surveying him with eyes as serious as those with which he had surveyed the scene. A small hand courteously raised a red fez from a fair, curling head. Wynn returned the salute, the shadow of a smile lightening his gravity. The child's grey eyes travelled slowly over the man's blue serge-clothed limbs, then rested on the eyes so like his own.

"I like you!" he affirmed with decision.

"You are very kind," responded Wynn, scrutinising the small upturned face keenly, and yet in an abstracted manner, as though while he talked he cogitated, as to what idea the boy linked him. "And do you know, that is the heartiest welcome I have ever

received here." Then he laid bare his thought. "I seem to know you; who are you?"

"Paul," with an indescribable air, and uplifting of the head.

Paul? The name conveyed nothing. Yet, what did he remember of this child? His voice, where and when had he heard it before? Vague recollections, remembrances, as of dreams, flitted before his mental vision; half-conceived ideas, passions that "died before they were born," still-born conceptions of another sphere. Had he himself lived before in another world? Was he remembering? His brows contracted with thought, and a feeling new, inexplicably sweet, possessed him — sweeter than anything that had gone before.

"Paul? What besides Paul?"

"Paul, Marvel and Max."

Wynn caught his breath; every nerve in his body tingled; the lake and the sunshine faded; he and Marvel were up on the peaks together, alone amid the snow. His pulses throbbed like sledge-hammers; he lifted his hat to let the cool air fan his forehead. The rumbling of avalanches died in his ears, he heard the swish of tiny waves, and saw the gold of the autumn day, and the little waiting figure, breast high among the bracken.

Bareheaded, the man knelt. Again that sensation of knowledge swept over him. The earnest eyes meet-

ing his own looked back at him with reminders of a dim past. It was not as though the face were newly seen, he knew the wistfulness of it, the repression, the baby yearning. His heart ached. Vicariously? No, strangely, at some old suffering of his own. He strove for recollection; all his force was concentrated upon the effort to recall. Then, with a catch of the breath, he stooped closer and brought his face to the level of the child's. His heart thumped heavily; all life seemed focused in that search to see himself in the wide watching eyes, in the quivering face.

"My God!" he breathed at last, as Marvel had cried. But there was no protest in his cry, no horror, only wonder and despair. His face whitened, all the old lines were deeply marked, he pushed his hair off his forehead, looked up at the great snow-peaks that had witnessed his triumph with a gesture almost of appeal, then drew the pliant little body to his breast, and rested his bowed head on the golden hair.

He knew. Nature had laid his secret bare. In all his pain there was no unbelief, but fulness of corroboration was to follow in the lad's statement.

"—— an' Mummy was sorry, an' said I must never speak of it, never think of it. She hated it, and Farver Max hated it too."

The plaintive voice broke upon Wynn's thoughts at last.

"Hated what?" asked he vaguely.

"You see," answered Paul, with that sublime and simple egotism of childhood that believes the sympathetic stranger infinitely interested in its affairs, "I 'm not sure that I ought to tell you: I 'm never to speak of it to Farver Max, an' never to do it, and oh, I want to do it!"

The little hand that lay on Wynn's breast trembled. Wynn laid his own upon it. The trouble that he saw in Paul's face rebuked his own.

"Do what, my son? What is it that vexes you?"

"Paint Mummy! An' I must n't"—he sighed deeply—"nor nothing; nor ever. An' I *do* want to."

The sweet lips shook. The blood rushed to Wynn's brow; he was alert again, alive.

"Then I say you *shall*," he said quietly, his face rigid as ice. Who dared to tyrannise over his son, to crush out his heaven-sent gift with semi-barbarism? With set mouth and glittering eyes he rose to his feet. And Marvel, who stood on the kitchen steps looking out mournfully over the sparkling scene, saw the father of her son approaching with his most autocratic bearing, leading the boy by the hand; and Paul, with uplifted face, was chatting confidingly. Her heart leapt as she beheld, her torpor vanished, quick emotions registered themselves upon her countenance, like shadow and shine passing over the surface water. The struggle between opposing forces sent the blood from *her face;* forced it back in burning flame; extinguished

it again. The situation that she had faced so long surprised and startled her in the newness of its presentation. Here was an unrehearsed scene, her life's difficulty facing her with menace.

She fell back as Wynn came on ; the inflexibility of his expression roused her old primitive ferocity. To think and feel was to express with her. And when Wynn came to a halt in front of her, still holding the boy, and demanded more by tone and glance than the scarce-breathed words, " Whose son is this ? " with a dramatic gesture that fitted the sombre obstinacy which made curt her speech, she pointed to a mirror hanging on the wall.

" Ask the looking-glass ! " she said.

Feature by feature the man scanned his own face and the child's; each little mark of likeness was visible to his attentive eyes. The implacable cold strength of his own countenance, the pitiless anger of his eyes startled and arrested him. His chest heaved, his shaking hands betrayed something of what he felt. The wonder of the boy's expression recalled him. He stooped down and kissed the parted lips, kissed them again and again.

" My Paul," he whispered, " go now, son. I will come to you soon."

What did he mean to do ? Marvel panted for assurance ; instinct, nature, rose ; he could not, should not, rob her ? Was this the harsh fatality that should

befall? No, no. Submission was transformed into hardness and strength. Her eyes were fastened on every move of the man, lest it led to her robbery.

Wynn staggered to the chair by the table, and hid his face on his arms. "Cheated," she heard him say.

Then, yes, this was a contingency she had not reckoned with—a compromise for their child. She closed the doors, turned the locks, moving swiftly and determinedly, then came back and stood near him, as one who meant to fight.

He looked up presently, with haggard face. "Was this your revenge?" he asked hoarsely.

The proud hauteur of her bearing, the scornful glance of her dark eyes alone answered him, for other answer she did not give. He read it, and rose.

"I ask your pardon," he said in his throat. His white, drawn face pleaded for him. His suffering smote her. She had dwelt so long on the suffering that Max must bear, that possible pain to Wynn had escaped her. It was a tribute, and, woman-like, she was touched.

"I did not know, I did not even guess till that night after I left the studio—the night you showed me the pictures."

The scene rose vividly to both—the man pleading, the woman pardoning. The irony of it struck both. Their eyes met.

"It was too late!" she whispered with something of fear.

"Too late to undo—yes!" he agreed, speaking, like her, in subdued tones, but with none of her acceptation in his voice or manner. "Too late to undo the results of your rashness, but not to prevent the shadow falling on another life."

He meant Cordelia, of course. That was the reason why he had given himself up to such a passion of grief. At the bottom that was the reason. No wish to keep faith with herself. She had put herself into voluntary exile.

"You never filled my heart, you had no power to hold it," he interrupted her thoughts sternly. "You concluded *that*. And having so concluded, you would not take second best." His eyes held hers. "You threw your cards away before the game was played out," he added, with brutal directness. "The child would have fixed my thought."

She gave a cry. Narrower and narrower seemed that self-chosen path of sacrifice.

"You have robbed me, and robbed my son," proceeded the accusing voice. "I feel my childhood born in him afresh—imagination, genius, struggling for an outlet. My God!"—he took her arm in a grip of iron, his moving face so close that she felt his breath on her own—"you dare not crush the divine spark that is in him! Would you throttle a lark to stifle its song?

Would you batter a flower to beat out its perfume? I am not capable of self-abandonment, you think—you shall see. I will sacrifice all"—he paused, considered; looked down, then looked up again quietly—"*all*, everything but the innocent defenceless life. It must not be doomed to barrenness."

Wynn let go his hold of her, and paced in agitation up and down.

"Perpetual search, and no goal; hope, with never a realisation; desire, and no consummation, the master-passion abating nothing of its demands because of incessant denial—this living death for my son? No!" he declared. "This hell thrust upon him for his father's sin? Never!"

"What will you do?" asked Marvel, facing him and stopping his walk. "You began by being too eager to do everything, and be everything, and conquer everything. Don't be too eager over again."

He looked at her dazedly, and passed his hand over his eyes. Marvel's words recalled Cordelia. It seemed so long ago since they had walked together in the avenue and she had assured him that the deeds of the body must be paid for in the body. This, then, was his punishment? His fatherhood clamoured, and had no rights. The genius of his first-born must be the blood upon the portals? He had longed to serve for his sin, and, with a man's inconsistency, rebelled at the chastening.

He went over to the fireplace, and fell into his favourite attitude—elbow upon the shelf. For a moment he gazed into the fire, then turned his eyes upon Marvel. She had a new significance to him, new dignity, new interest. She was the mother of his child—the son who had inherited his genius. He felt that he had everything to learn concerning her, that she was a problem unsolved. That fatal *resistance* of hers, was it that which had kept them apart? Their two personalities had never harmonised: what was the cause of it? What dignity and feeling she had displayed all through, and the *finale* brought him back to his first surmise, that some part of her had ever held supreme freedom from himself. And yet she was the mother of the child that echoed his highest. And Cordelia was the woman of his love. She set him free, Marvel chained him; but yet in ravishment at knowledge of her motherhood he would have given Cordelia for the legitimacy of his son. Nature won the triumph for Marvel for which she had striven in vain; won it with extreme simplicity, by bringing back the man to his first want, the perpetuation of his best. And this magnificent gift of life, this child that would satisfy his hunger for immortality, lost to him! His honours, his name, that might have enriched his son, what were they in this hour? He went through an intellectual defeat, that Marvel, watching, could not gauge. She had walked with a firm, calm step over his dearest

hope ; followed some light of her own, and led them all into confusion.

He turned from her, hiding his face. She made no attempt to comfort him, but gazed at him sombrely.

She was surprised at the manner in which he took it. His deep breathing and trembling, clenched hands said more than his words. How was she to guess at the strength of fatherhood embedded in that proud heart, how reconcile that gay, cynical exterior, which had alternately fascinated and offended her, with this bowed man ? There had been times long past when she would have used any weapon to hold and humble him, and that in her hand she had unwittingly thrown away.

" Wynn," she said, hesitated, and went on. " Ask yourself well if what you now deplore was not in the old time a blessed liberty. Be honest, be just—possession then seemed very like oppression. I knew it, and I set you free. That was the day of my sorrow——"

" And this of mine ! "

" I was content for you to go free," she proceeded, passion stirring the deadness of her voice, " for the evil then seemed the evil of binding you to inequality of conditions—of hampering you with relations not of your sort. I heard you tell Cordelia that you had made yourself environments——"

" Don't," he pleaded from the shelter of his arm.

" Ay," she went on, unheeding, " and with such a

look no girl could tamely bear! And I was not tame —not then! Do you think it possible, loving you as I loved you then, Wynn Winter, that I could bear for you to feel that your wife was a privation, a load and a trouble, that my love was n't worth a wish? You longed for harmony and perfection, and all that was not to be found in me. You 've had your wish!"

She drew herself up with a new confidence as she approached again the feeling of that past day.

"And if I 'd wanted it, I have had my revenge. But I did n't want it. It 's a poor sort of love that turns spiteful in the end, and nothing of a woman who can take a hand in the dragging down of the man she once prided in. And I did pride in you, Wynn. I 'm not Cordelia, I can't enter into your imagining, and when you wander from the way you want, set you right again, but I could remove an obstacle from your path, and I removed it!"

She touched him on the arm, and he looked up. Her eyes filled, her lips quivered. "I was the obstacle," she added; "the roots of my love had struck deep. It hurt."

It was her first reproach. If it struck, he did not make a sign. But she saw that he was listening.

"There 's no undoing it, ever. It 's got to be borne. It 's new to you now, but you 'll get used to the sorrow of it. It was new to me once."

The words told their own tale of silent suffering.

He was beginning to comprehend. "And this is not the worst of it," she added quietly, as though she had faced it from all points. "There 'll come a day of reckoning with the boy. But that 's not yet!"

"What is to be the end of it?" he asked stupidly.

"There is Max to think of first."

He roused at that.

"Max?" he queried haughtily.

She turned her eyes upon him resentfully. "Max," she responded, and left more unsaid.

"Again forgive me," he said, stung to the heart by his own forgetfulness. "Marvel, listen to me. When I came to you this afternoon it was with a heart full of gratitude for a great joy. Yes, Cordelia's love." He went over to her, and laid his hand upon her arm. "You had set me free—you remember? But, girl, I never *was* free. Something at the back of my mind bound me; or your evident unhappiness. I came to-day hoping to hear news that would restore you to peace. You know the rest. Now tell me. What of Max?"

He stopped and tried to smile, imprisoning her hands. She gave him a quick look, and saw that there was no pretence.

"The operation takes place to-morrow. His sight is sure."

Again they gazed into each other's eyes; neither flinched.

" Marvel, listen to me," he said, with sudden realisation and compunction, his clasp on her hands tightening, " I must be here. My place is here beside you."

She shook her head.

" It is true," he urged, " true that I have seemed to desert you, not to care "—he bent piteously to her, his voice faltered—" but to-day you are avenged. Sex has avenged you ; you are the mother of my son, and I have neither right of husband nor father to defend. Can you realise what it means to me to stand by and see another man invested with the power to will or withhold his will concerning the child ? " His voice grew husky, his eyes dim. " I told you once," he added, " that I owed you half my world. You have it—my son."

" Indeed, Wynn," she answered, so quietly that a lark singing outside was distinctly heard, " this is not the hour to compare our loss or gain, or fight for the boy : all that must come after. This is Max's hour. He sleeps now in peace. When his eyes are opened he will see more than the light of God's day, he will see what you have seen. You fume at your wrongs," she proceeded, in dull weariness ; " it remains to be seen how he will regard *his*. No, don't touch me—I 'm past comforting. I 've little hope, for the mind of a man as you 've interpreted it is hard, hard. Say what you will, it 's hard ! "

" Please don't," he pleaded, and leaned again upon his hand, and thought.

" You don't see a way out," she said presently, without mercy ; " neither do I. I see nothing but Max."

" Max must bear it," he answered.

" He sha'n't be asked," she retorted sharply, " till he is able. I 'll take care of that."

" Marvel," asked Wynn, after a long silence, " will you permit me to be here with you to-morrow ? "

She answered with an emphatic " No. I 've been alone all through," she said ; then, remembering, added, " but I don't blame anybody for that, not anybody. I went my own way from the first, and I 'll go through with it."

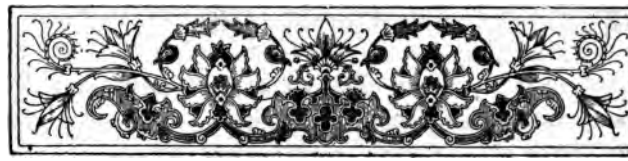
" Marvel, what shall you do ? " he asked.

" Do ? " she queried, meeting the distress of his eyes, quietly. " I do ? It is not for me to say—Max shall be my lawgiver. But if you 'd like to have Paul for a few days, take him to Cordelia ; he 'll be all right there," she added gently, compassion in her glance.

He was the child's father after all. Perhaps Max— She suddenly paled and swayed, and would have fallen but for Wynn's arm. He looked at her anxiously ; at the fear in her eyes.

" My poor girl, I will not trick you ! " he murmured gently.

But that was not her fear.



CHAPTER XXIV

TWO CHILDHOODS—AND THE MAN BETWEEN

THE real meaning of the situation was forced upon Wynn as he led Paul to meet Cordelia. The bewildering sweetness of his new passion had beguiled him ; the boy's incessant chatter on the lake, his evident satisfaction in his new acquaintance, was an experience so unlike anything the man could chronicle, that it had soothed and charmed him. Paul's absorption in himself, his extravagant glee at his outing, reduced Wynn to smiling acquiescence. The child had the mastery till Cordelia came towards them under the trees, with swift movement of welcome. Her eyes and lips were smiling ; she glanced from the tiny figure moving with such confidence beside her lover, whose step was slow to accommodate the skipping steps, to Wynn's face, and something in its expression seemed to arrest her, for her glance stayed a moment before it went back to the child.

Paul stood with uncovered head in quick imitation

of the man whom he admired, at no disadvantage, if beauty could compromise the position; the fresh wind had blown roses to his cheeks; his grey eyes were sparkling.

"I 've come!" explained he, as no one hurried to speak.

"Why, so I see!" said Cordelia, in her most caressing tones, slipping to her knees, and drawing the boy to her, who was eying her attentively in childlike fashion, somewhat shyly. "And thou art——"

Wynn prevented the word upon her lips by a sound and movement that disturbed her.

"Wait—look well."

In the stress of feeling his tones were sharp; his expression was charged with more than common meaning; the knit brows, the quivering nostrils, had significance. She looked back at the child, then at Wynn again, bewildered, but still smiling.

"This is Marvel's son?" she half queried, half affirmed.

"Yes. But look at his face again, and then at mine."

She obeyed slowly. Her eyes dwelt upon the young face grown grave beneath her scrutiny, then turned to the man in a long, steady gaze. Her pupils widened and contracted, the lids trembled and fell, there was a slight, barely perceptible straining and uplifting of the whole figure, and when she looked again Wynn knew

that she understood; that in those keen palpitating moments he had stood at the bar of the pure soul, hurt its maidenly reserve, shaken its faith, and pleaded for absolution. Her head dropped over the boy, her hood hiding her face.

"Thou art welcome, Paul," she said tremulously, but distinctly, caressing his golden hair. "I have often heard of thee, but I have not seen thee since thou wert a baby. I am thy mother's friend!"

She had struck the keynote in that word; gave earnest reality to that sweet womanhood which of all her chains most held the man. But he knew enough of her, however, to realise that she had placed the woman as a bar between them. If she was jealous of the past, it was no mean jealousy. He could not say a single syllable; the absence of the vulgarity of wounded vanity in her, of any display of exaggerated feeling, so touched him that he could have knelt to her. As they walked the child was between them, and holding to her seemed to divide her from Wynn. With that quick insight and sympathy which instantly knew his pang, she said to Paul softly, "Give—him—your other hand."

With a grip that made the child wince Wynn's fingers closed on the soft hand. He threw Cordelia a glance of adoration which she did not or would not see.

"I have a gentle playfellow for thee at home," she said to the boy—"an old, old man, my father, with

hair beautiful as thine, but white like the snow upon the mountains ; thou and he will be two boys together. What news of Max ? " she asked abruptly, turning to Wynn.

And talking over Paul's head he told her.

" Now, that is good news to hear ! " she answered. " Good news for Marvel and Max, and for the friends who love them ! "

She did not realise, Wynn saw. She was turning resolutely to some bright picture of her own conjuring.

" Marvel asks you to keep the lad here with us "— he hesitated—"until such time as Max— Cordelia——"

His voice was an appeal. But she misunderstood it.

" Most willingly ! " she answered.

What disillusionment was she suffering ? Her quiet was not lethargy of feeling. Here in her mountain home she had cherished an ideal of life, exempt from fierce conflict of passion. How would she read this drama that was unfolding before her ? His hope lay in that broad spiritual sense of hers, which got beneath vulgar fact and enlightened her mind with understanding. He had the story yet to tell, to show the possible consequences.

When they reached the cottage, the quaint, picturesque room was pleasant with firelight, a meal spread in waiting for the guest. Beside the fire, as though sensitive to the chill of the autumn air, the old

artist sat with hands spread to the blaze. He rose as the little party entered the room; the words of welcome that were on his lips for Wynn changed to exclamation at sight of Paul.

"A child? Or do these dim eyes play tricks with me?"

He stretched out his hand, and the lad in wonder at the white beard and hair stopped short in his prancing, and gazed into the face of the old man.

"Thou see'st Marvel's son," answered Cordelia cheerfully, taking the child forward, who, remembering his manners, doffed his cap and named himself.

"Sir, I am Paul!"

"A fine boy, too, who has robbed the sunbeams for his hair. Father and mother both are proud of you, I 'll warrant! Come closer while I look at you. My eyes have not your keenness. Who do they say you are most like—father or mother?"

The firelight shone upon the two heads—one silver, one gold. Cordelia placed herself between the light and the child.

"Give him your blessing!" she said gently, and turned his thoughts. The old man laid his wrinkled hands upon the glistening curls.

"Eternal youth be thy portion!" he said, wavered, sat down, and drew the boy to his knee. "I know what I say," he muttered, drawing him closer yet; "age is feebleness; hope cheats, cheats; the best of love hath

its disloyalties." He had fallen into his habit of self-commune; but Wynn and Cordelia heard. Wynn choked; the scene was taxing him beyond endurance. Cordelia, moving to perform her simple preparations, seemed to see nothing, to hear nothing; but the air was electrified to both woman and man. As Wynn stood looking through the window he heard every soft movement, felt her as she passed him, till feeling was pain. He saw nothing of what he looked upon, but the vision of her as he had conjured it, of that other luxurious home to which he could not go alone.

"A bonnie boy," broke in the old man's voice upon his thoughts. "Cordelia, when you are mother to such a lad you will be a proud madam!" he chuckled, well pleased at the idea, "and your father and husband will seek you often, vainly."

Over the still face a wave of colour passed and faded. The hands arranging the teacups trembled, but whatever anguish the woman-heart felt at the knowledge that she would not be the mother of her lover's first-born, that child of hers would not be the first to call the look into his face she had seen there this afternoon, she gave no further sign.

"When Farver Max can see," the child's treble informed them, "he will take me to the mountains, high up, up, up!" His voice rose as he ascended in imagination. "There are things to see there, an' the snow comes down, an' down, an' down. An' Farver

Max ses the wind blows like music there, an' the sky 's more bluer than the picture skies. An' I shall see it, he 's promised me. But Mummy ses it 's better never to come down no more, when once you climb."

Wynn thought he should break loose, or go mad.

"Ay, ay!" responded the quavering voice, "that 's true, that 's true!"

"An' then Farver Max ses," continued Paul, stroking the silky beard of his interested auditor, "that him an' me an' Mummy are going a long way off to see the *world*. It 's such a big place an' such a crowd of people, an' Mummy does n't never want to come back no more!"

"Thou hast an active tongue!" interjected Cordelia; "come and engage it with these cakes." She lit the lamp as she spoke.

After the first mouthful, Paul turned to his host with a courteous movement so like Wynn's that Cordelia was fascinated.

"Sir, did you make the pictures on the walls?"

The old artist bowed.

Paul looked around. "Were you a boy once?" he asked interestedly.

"I was."

"And did your farver and mummy wish you would n't do it?"

"They did."

Paul sighed.

"Come, now, thou art not eating thy cake," reminded Cordelia.

When the meal was finished, the old man drew the boy to his knee again, and Cordelia, having cleared the table, sat down near the lamp to sew. Wynn seated himself opposite, glanced at the two children at the fire, absorbed in each other, then fixed his eyes upon the face that baffled him.

"Cordelia!" he pleaded. Her needle clicked against her thimble once, twice, then she looked up.

He flushed, stammered, tried to recall what he wanted to say, then was diverted by her father's voice.

"We stand for the two eternities—the past and future—two childhoods, two childhoods! But there is a man between——"

Wynn caught at the suggestion. "Chained, unless a woman sets him free!"

She looked at him, and he at her.

"There is an honour due to a man's wife which many a man hath brought who brought love too," she said. Her fair hands stitched industriously, her eyes were bent upon her work.

He stretched his hand and laid it on hers. "No, let it be," he said, "and look at me. If there be memory in the grave, if thoughts recur in eternity, this hour will punish me sufficiently."

"An' when a man grows, can he do everythink—everythink he wants?" asked Paul.

Cordelia and Wynn listened for the answer.

"Alas! alas! doing is failure! Forgetting is peace!"

"Darling, do you hear?" breathed Wynn.

Cordelia let her hands lie on her needlework and looked him full in the eyes. "Forgetting is cowardice," she said. "Hast thou nothing to tell me?"

He withdrew his gaze. "My tale," he answered, "your purity must hurt. It is a base return for your sweet trust."

"And may not one woman hear what another suffereth?"

"Cordelia, I have sinned; but not as you surmise. I did not desert the woman; she——"

"Deserted thee?" queried Cordelia, surprised.

"No, no. Not that either! She relinquished—because she thought we loved each other!"

Her needle clicked sharply against the thimble. The sweet seriousness of her face was disturbed.

"Tell on," she said. He opened a book and read:

"There was a poet, madam, once (said he),
Who, while he walked at sundown in a lane,
Took to his heart the hope that destiny
Had singled him this guerdon to obtain,
That by the power of his sweet minstrelsy
Some hearts for truth and goodness he should gain,
And charm some grovellers to uplift their eyes,
And suddenly wax conscious of the skies."

"He did well!" she answered him.

"Yes, he did well," assented Wynn; "better than I, for my consideration was not whom I might uplift. My heart was cold to the mission of art. I loved art, I did not love the woman, but I coveted her beauty for my art's sake."

Her needle flew in and out of the cambric swiftly; her mouth set sternly; he watched her breathlessly.

There was a stir from the fireplace. The old artist had risen with the sleeping boy in his arms. He laid him upon the couch, covered him lightly with a rug, then stood gazing at the picture-face framed in its confusion of gold. His lips moved as he talked to himself; presently he bent down and kissed the fair forehead, went to the door, and opening it, stood for a moment looking out into the moonlight; then reaching for his hat, turned to observe Cordelia and Wynn, and stepped out, closing the door softly behind him.

Wynn crossed to the couch, and standing with arms folded, and eyes fixed on the sleeping face, told all there was to tell without exaggeration or extenuation, as though the sight of his son nerved him. He made no appeal to Cordelia, not by a glance, was not aware of the impression made as stroke by stroke the picture grew. There was no effort or noise, no struggle. When all was said, he turned to find Cordelia standing beside him, with clasped hands, her eyes devouring him.

"Ah!" she breathed, "how I have seemed to rob

her! Canst thou not see that I have been the cause of this?"

"You?"

"How blind I was! How blind thou wert to flaunt our preference in Marvel's face"—a flush dyed her cheeks—"in thy *wife's* face. Wynn Winter, thou hast shamed me in mine own eyes, and in the eyes of the mother of thy son. Why didst thou not give to her her rightful place—the wife that was to be!—that no other maiden might seem to coquet with thee?"

He was surprised. Her anger was all for the other woman's sake, the shame for her own.

The smooth soft sentences took force. Her proud head was carried haughtily.

"Thou art a very man, and wilt storm all forts, thinking that power justifieth thee; but it is a mean thing to make 'targets of souls.'"

"I did not realise—I only loved you!"

"There is a greater thing than a man's love—there is a woman's," she proceeded quietly. "There is Marvel's. It was great in its renunciation. It is not for me to condemn its sin. Some sins seem purer than other virtues—and lift higher. Fate hath dealt mercifully by thee, the man, that thou couldst not drag her down. The strength that could carry such a load in silence is stronger than my virtuous years. Didst thou tell her so?"

"Cordelia!"

" Nay, then, but it is left for me to say—that is the part for woman, to lift up the woman that the man cast down. One cannot both destroy and build. None but a woman's confidence and love can restore a woman to her peace. The best of man doth never enter the secret chamber where a woman's finest feelings are. We keep them for a woman's handling—and for *these!*" She made a telling gesture towards the sleeping child, and kneeling, touched his hair.

" Cordelia," murmured Wynn, feeling like one who had closed the gate of Paradise upon himself, " who taught you all this? You speak like a woman who has trodden life's wine-press with aching feet."

" I know not how I know, but I know."

He stood looking down upon her with working face.

" You will never forgive me," he affirmed hoarsely.

" Now there thou art wrong," she said softly. " I have no cause against thee. I did love thee as thou wert—my heart selected thee with thy wrong-headedness; I love thee better as thou art now, baffled and beaten, with the grace of thy humility; but I shall love thee best as thou wilt yet be." She turned her head and lifted her eyes swimming in tears.

He gave an inarticulate cry, and made to fold her in his arms. But she held out a protesting hand, and rose.

" Marvel's cause is mine. Thou art bound to her still. If Max doth turn his face from her, thy duty is clear."

"You mean—" His breath came heavily, he held out a pleading hand.

"I mean Marvel—and thy son. The position has passed from thy hands, and from mine also," she said quietly.

"A moment ago you linked our lives!" he reminded her passionately.

"And they are linked," she answered, wincing at the misery in his face, "mine unto thee for evermore. Dear heart, I love thee! Thy failures are my failures, and thy triumphs mine. But the woman renounced for thee, and if she will I will renounce for the woman. Thou must not murmur, thou art in the threshing-machine. And in thine heart of hearts thou art longing to do justly."

CHAPTER XXV

FROM DARK TO DAWN

MARVEL sat alone in the kitchen. To-morrow the bandages were to be removed from Max's eyes. She was thinking intently, her eyes fixed upon the blazing logs, the light of which shone on her face and picked out every splendid curve of figure. Her scarlet bodice threw the round white throat into relief, and emphasised the vivid colouring of her face, and Cordelia, whose knock had been unanswered, and who entered unobserved, stood for a moment in silent admiration, before—feeling the rush of cold air that came through the open door—Marvel turned. In that moment's scrutiny of the woman, so still in her grief and anxiety, Cordelia realised the strength that could stand alone in its hour of direst need. She and this mobile, susceptible creature had little in common, except their love for the same man, and as Marvel rose, this thought was visible in her face; also the stately grace of Cordelia hurt her anew, as it had ever cut her

off in some mysterious way from indemnifying herself with Wynn's world. But the restraint was on her part alone. Cordelia closed the door, and with shining eyes and outstretched hands came on.

"Pardon this intrusion," pleaded she; "thou art not pleased to see me?"

"Not particularly!"

The two women eyed each other. Marvel flushed; Cordelia's face was white, her fragility struck the other; they so seldom met that it was the more noticeable. But if she suffered, the compelling spell of her individual charm had not lessened.

"I come a suppliant; do not cut me off from thee in this hour. Sister, I have wronged thee unknowingly."

A faint tinge of colour suffused the fair cheeks; she clasped her hands; the intentness of her look spoke of her earnestness. Marvel watched her with puzzled admiration. Cordelia was contending with something in her mind outside Marvel's wrestling.

"When I took Wynn from thee — I did not know," she faltered. The sweetness and purity of the woman before her all at once struck Marvel with new force. For the first time she felt shame. Horror, regret, misery, had been hers in full; but how deficient she must seem in Cordelia's eyes! The defiant attitude that she always unconsciously assumed in her rival's presence, and which Cordelia now thought she understood, wavered and drooped. Her eyes fell.

" I did not know," repeated Cordelia.

Marvel turned aside to draw a chair to the hearth. " I wondered sometimes if he had told you about me before he went, and whether that was the reason you sent him away ? "

" No, thou didst desire silence."

Both women were fighting against reserve, conscious that they were not responsive to each other ; but Cordelia could not bring herself to speak of those passages between herself and Wynn which she had approached with the passion of her spirituality. That deep current of feeling that had flown to her was hers alone. Whatever had passed between the man and this girl, she realised that what was poignantly real had been given to herself ; that the deepening and expanding of his nature belonged not to Marvel ; but that Marvel was conscious of the fact, that it had in great measure influenced her action, surprised her.

" It seemed better for everybody then. There was no reason, as I supposed, to bind a man like Wynn Winter to his weakest. It would have chafed him and me—if it could have been done. And I meant no dishonesty to Max."

She made these explanations in a nervous, flurried way, and left Cordelia to fill in the gaps.

" In the beginning of Max's illness," she went on, stooping to mend the fire, and so evading the searching eyes, " it was uncertain what the issue would be, and,

until the night Wynn showed us his pictures, I had n't guessed. Then he went away before I could see him again. And Max bore his blindness so sweetly because of me, that I *could n't* disturb his peace. It would have been easier for me if I could—" A sort of defiance entered her tone, as though throwing off any imputation that deceit had taken part in her reticence. " It was n't that I was too weak to face the consequences—for I always knew they 'd got to be faced some time. Oh, to give up the burden once and for all ! You don't know—how can you know the nightmare of the untold half of these years ! " Her voice broke, but she mastered it. " To live with a day of reckoning haunting you is n't joy. But the day for honesty had n't arrived. It will be to-morrow." She shuddered a little, still busying herself with the log.

" Thou art right," responded Cordelia earnestly. " I did not know thy suffering, but I can realise its jarring. All my own peace and comfort hath seemed to place me selfishly apart from thee ; but in the day of my knowledge, how can I live, how dare I live, till I have endeavoured to lift with thee ? "

" Nobody was to blame for anything I did—except my father," Marvel added reluctantly, turning from the fire. " I 've come of a race who pull their temples about their ears in their heat, and try to rebuild at leisure. It was n't anything you did or did not do," she added with a faint intonation of pride. " If it had

been a fair fight, girl against girl, I should n't have considered you; but it did n't seem honest when I knew I had neither name nor respectability. Wynn is n't the man to mate with a convict's granddaughter. I 'd been brought up to fancy myself a lady—I felt one somehow. As soon as I understood, I drew back."

"The dishonesty was not thine," answered Cordelia.

"Neither was it Wynn's," responded Marvel, defence in her manner as she faced round. "He never deceived me or tricked me; I deceived and tricked myself. So if that has been keeping you apart, don't let it."

Cordelia looked at Marvel wistfully, reluctant to take her word too readily. She had not accepted the proffered chair, and both still stood. By an accident of inheritance both women had the courage of endurance in their veins, although the swift passion that first destroyed before it endured had not entered Cordelia's blood. But she could scourge herself and others, if need be, and Marvel realised this as she read the resolution under the sweet wistfulness.

"The wrong dates to that which my father did my mother," she said.

Cordelia took Marvel's hand. "It is of thee I came to speak, not of any other. This is the hour of thy need. I am here to serve thee. Because thou art willing to gather to thyself all the consequences, I am not willing to play an unjust part. Until I know that

thou wilt not need"—she pressed the hand she held, paused for an instant, then proceeded—"succour, I will not be set aside. The debt is not all thine, thou canst but own."

She was white, although she spoke so quietly. This, then, was the meaning of the sharpened face? Marvel bent towards her, and asked a little breathlessly, "Would Wynn desert you for Paul?"

Cordelia met the look bent upon her—she had seen it in Marvel's face before—the eagerness to triumph over her. She felt sick and humiliated; she withdrew her hand with a perceptible stiffening of manner. Pride touched the nobleness of her face, and checked its surrender.

"There is no question of desertion," she replied; "the question is justice." But she had betrayed herself. She was trying to persuade herself and Wynn into restitution.

Many feelings fought for mastery in Marvel, but honesty rushed to her rescue.

"And do you think justice would fill your life and his? even if it could be done!" she burst out. "I made that impossible to the child—and for the rest, only Max can mend it." Her voice had a sound of bitterness as she proceeded. "Am I the sort of woman to be satisfied with half-measures, do you think? Should I have done what I did, if I could be content to chain the man to me while any other woman had his

soul?" She laughed harshly. "We shall never quarrel about Wynn Winter, Cordelia; his path and mine lie apart this side the grave. I haven't learnt so little in all this as to be weak enough to want avenging. I 'll work out my own salvation, or it never will be worked. The question that 's burning in both our hearts, Cordelia Grey, may be the same question, but apart from Wynn Winter."

She drew back, pushed back her hair, and in her eyes was an expression so like that of the picture that Cordelia was electrified, startled from her calm. She was standing, and put out her hand with a quick gesture.

"The question is——?"

"Will my husband forgive me?"

She drew in her breath. Her eyes were fastened on Marvel's. Relief, gratitude, swept over her in a flood. "You—you love Max?" she breathed. Her sudden joy shone in her eyes.

"I don't think a woman could be all I 've been to Max, and not care," she answered simply. "For six years I 've been his eyes and his hands. And a woman is like that; you 'll know, if ever there 's a helpless life depending on you—you can't help loving what leans on you!"

Cordelia drew closer. "Marvel," she said, "thou hast learned the secret of woman's happiness—to feel the clinging hand. Now dost thou think that the one

who hath clung can stand without thee; that he can find peace without thine accustomed ways?"

"That is between Max and me."

And Cordelia understood.

"He will know his best! Oh, he will know it!" affirmed she, as she placed both hands on Marvel's arm. With her quick divination she understood that what love could not do between husband and wife would be ill done. But at the bottom of her heart lay a little fear of Max. The dominant note of his character was not submission. And she saw that Marvel feared too.

"Go now," said Marvel. "I hear Max moving. Send Paul to-morrow."

"Wilt thou kiss me?" asked Cordelia. And the women kissed.

"Has Cordelia gone?" called out Max, groping his way into the room. "I heard Cordelia Grey, did n't I? Come to inquire of the invalid, eh? Did you tell her I 'm as strong as an ox—that I 'll be up on the mountains before twenty-four hours are over my head?" He laughed and rattled on without waiting for an answer, sitting on the edge of the table, and folding his arms. "Tony counted without the mountains when he made me your steward, Marvel. I shall always be running off! How 's the boy? and where 's Wynn? Shall I see everybody to-morrow?"

"Perhaps!"

He put out his arm and drew Marvel to him. "That 's a sparing sort of answer. You 've economised your words lately, do you know? Tired? Dog-tired, of course you are; all this nursing has been too much for you—with all that went before." He drew a long breath, and held her close with both arms, leaning his forehead on her breast.

"It 's *sure*. The doctor had a long talk just now—fine fellow he is too—described an ascent he and two fellows made of Mount Cook. Narrow shave! Stood all night on a ridge of ice." His head was uplifted, his expression eager; his face looked younger than Marvel had ever seen it, the tender mouth all smiling curves.

"Think of Switzerland!" he exclaimed; and then followed an animated account of what he had heard and read. "We 'll do it all together, lass! Ah, Marvel, it is n't fair that you have brought me all this—and there 's my violin!"

"Does it mean so much, then, Max? You have never said."

"Said! Some things were too hard to speak of!"

His head went down upon her breast again, and as he held her she felt the quivering of his arms. Her eyes were tender as she looked down on him. This spontaneity in him, his unusual enthusiasm, showed her how he had repressed, held back, crushed in himself desire, and joy, and ambition; how terrible had

been the cramping, the defrauding, of his youth. Both their minds travelled the same road, for he laughed apologetically.

"Some folk have their old age first. I was old at ten. I 'm younger at thirty; young enough to do something yet. Marvel, Marvel, I will do something, something that shall make you proud of me."

"Don't, dear."

"Very well, I won't."

A silence followed. Then Max spoke again; a tide of feeling rose that he could not check.

"New horizons, new thoughts—a world of thought and action all before us. Dear, how I used to envy Wynn Winter! I am not given to envying men, but I envied *him.*" She drew her breath, her eyes looked startled.

"Sometimes when we were up on M'Kinnon's Pass we sat up half the night talking. He gave me an idea of life, intellectual life, the world of thought—his world. And what a gulf between him and me! Not only in possession, but in knowledge. But I 'll bridge it. Genius itself is name without knowledge—I learned that the night I heard a genius play. We both had the same thought—he expressed it, I stuttered it. But I shall not always stutter! Yes," he reiterated, "I envied Wynn." He drew Marvel closer. "I admired him so much that I did n't see how you could help admiring him; he loved beauty so well, I did n't see how he could help loving you!"

Her throat contracted; she tried for words, found none, tried again.

"Max— I did——"

He put his hand over her mouth.

"Don't!" he said chokingly. "Don't say it. You never have said it to me—not to-night, dear. Dear, not to-night!" His face hardened, then he drew her arms round his neck. "Let the past go. There is to-morrow. I am content. I have heard in your voice what I have listened for all my life. I shall see your face to-morrow. And I shall see Paul. Your new face"—he drew her down and kissed her—"and Paul's will be strange to me. But Wynn's"—he smiled contentedly—"I can always recall it, always could; it is n't a face to forget easily. Listen: steady grey eyes set in a broad forehead, under finely marked brows——"

"Max, you must not. O Max, don't—you 're to be quiet, you know! I won't listen! I will *not* listen! I 'm going out for a row."

She unmoored her boat from the steps—the tide was high—and pushed off, not looking back, but pulling vigorously, long, steady, splendid strokes. The physical exertion relieved the pent-up force of feeling. To stay in the house and approach the morrow minute by minute meant madness. O blessed peace! blessed shadow of the everlasting hills! On and on, to the heart of the deep water, among the phantom mount-

ains, away from man's voice, away from finite things. The tension of thought was broken, the strain upon the muscles relieved the nerves. The repression had stifled her ; here in the shadowy evening nothing reproached, nothing menaced. Her constitutional recklessness and daring leapt at release from chains ; the old demand for happiness forced through denial, clamoured for its birthright. Her perfect health and innocent intent cried out for joy. Restraints, the freaks of custom, the reticences, perceptions, that implied past generations of discipline and future niceties, fell from her. Nature had burst her bonds, flouted the Puritan with her graceful absurdities of denial ; flung off the moral struggle, and gave impulse rein. Forget, live, be happy, be uncaring, shun pain !

The moon came over the silver peaks. Marvel loved all bright things, and rested on her oars to look. Lace scarfs of mist-cloud festooned about the groves, the shimmering, silver-dusted waves made " cradles for the moonbeams " and rocked reflected stars.

Marvel set sail. Hurrah for a last freedom ! The boat rocked, and she laughed at the wind whistling round the cords ; she and the boat and the wind were one, flying over the water, speeding to the silver falls. She was a girl to-night—to-morrow ? She sat down, and with infinite sadness in the dark eyes looked comprehensively along the exquisite sweep of water, with its forest-fringed towering walls. Time passed un-

heeded ; she and the night, with its haunting voices and her despair, were alone. Branded, mocked, she saw her grandfather in his youth : weak for an hour, strong and strenuous all the time that had gone before and come after. But who cared for, remembered, anything but the one weak hour ? That lost him all —love, trust, honour—the long holding on counted little, the momentary letting go all. Then why hold on ?

Meanwhile Max stood at the doorway, the cool breeze of the autumn night blowing about him, the strong sweet smell of forest and water in his nostrils, the familiar sound of night-birds and rustling foliage in his ears. He was in darkness still, except for a faint glimmering through the bandages ; but there was the light of expectation upon his face, its glow about his heart.

He went back to the beginning : to Marvel's advent in his life, their long division of sympathy, and all the horrors of what had seemed eternal darkness; but what mattered since it was over, and Marvel and he were inseparably one in interest and affection ?

But for that strange, unmanageable prejudice, that to Wynn he would owe nothing, the effect of the injury to his eyes might have been put right long ago. He wished he had made no mistake, had never doubted him ; and yet, again and again the smarting sense of

injury returned, garnered up since that evening of Marvel's refusal of his love, and her declaration that she would go to him from suffering, if at all. Her altered manner might merely have been from the effect of what Frank Meredith had revealed to her at that time. He had scarcely faced the thought that Wynn had affected her, yet it was inexplicably there.

While he pondered, his muscles stiffened—he did not realise that while he defended his wife in thought, in reality she needed defending against himself. Intolerance of restraint, implacability of will, had made the imperiousness of his rule hard, even to those who loved him best. The painful circumstance that had yielded Marvel so entirely into his hand, her self-compelling passion of subjection, had, unknown to himself, fostered that disposition of command, against which Mary Meredith had protested, and defended the girl again and again; fear of which the woman he had loved so long was fighting, in despair of mercy, although in full knowledge of that love. It was, perhaps, as well that his hour of humbling was to come before the day of his power. He became aware that hours had passed, and Marvel had not returned. Her attendance upon him had been dog-like in its faithfulness; no matter what the aloofness of his mood, her hands, feet, eyes, voice, had been his without the reckoning; he had taken for granted the surrender. Shut up in himself, had she been doing subtle penance in the desert?

A vague uneasiness invaded the autocracy of his mind. The memory of her voice as she had spoken this evening recurred. It had protest in it. Had she gone from the restraint of his presence? With recollection that came almost as a shock, the Marvel who had flouted him and the Marvel whom he to-night had felt tremble in his arms stood in mental juxtaposition. There were other things in the world besides her relation to him. The consciousness of this was a rekindling of his first fear—was he making himself hateful to her?

The timepiece in the room behind him struck midnight. All his senses were concentrated upon listening. He leant forward from the top step. The sound of wind and wave reached him; no splash of oar greeted his accustomed ear. Putting his hand to his mouth and throwing back his head, he called, "Coo-ee!" loudly, but getting no answer save that of his own voice, which reached far, he called again, "Coo-ee!" The protest and beseeching of his voice were futile; also the impatience. He put his hand to his bandages, hesitated, let it fall with a gesture of irritation and helplessness, and stood quite still.

One!

He started. The stroke of the clock went through him like a sharp knife. The giant frame quivered, as it had not quivered under physical pain; his mouth was drawn and set. All along the shore the sobbing waves moaned; shrieks of the wind came from the

gullies. To stand there like a log, helplessly waiting, spent his strength more than any strenuous effort of the body. Lord, Lord, would she never come?

One! Two!

The disproportion between his fear and his hope was so great that, when he called again, his voice was hoarse and wavering. Stay there while she lost her way? Not longer. She knew the lake almost as well as he; but Manapouri had her treacheries, and had deceived her lovers before now. He groped his way back into the house, found his boots, woollen jersey and cap, put them on with hands that shook, then groping with the uncertainty of the sightless not born blind, got back to the steps, and descending found the tide knee-deep. His boat, where was it moored? One more concentrated effort to listen, one more unanswered call. Then he freed his eyes. As God's dear world was given to him, again he gave a cry, and put out his hand and held by the rail of the steps to keep himself from falling. His voice rattled and gurgled in his throat like one dying; then, with reverent joy, he bared his head. He forgot his wife, forgot his quest. The dark, deeply lined face was ecstatic; the deep eyes, surrounded by scars, gazed round slowly at his beloved peaks dully gleaming under the waning moon among the star-spangled mists. Black and deep were the inscrutable valleys; mighty and strong the great mountain shoulders upon which the dome of sky

seemed to rest. His feverish, restless impatience was quelled ; he drank deep of an exquisite refreshment, the uplifting of a man gazing on the face of Nature that has been to him his strongest love.

At last he remembered, but intermittently, as when in the hour of gladness one remembers a past grief. He saw his old boat, familiar as a well-known face, but he did not hurry. His storm of feeling had passed, an unreasoned assurance of well-being had taken hold of him, as the sight of the child recompenses the mother for her doubt and pain. With long, strong strokes his oars dipped the shadowy water ; the wind had stilled to a gentle whisper, and he listened with grateful heart, feasted on every sombre shadow as night passed, and the reluctant dawn came up from an underworld of spring, with reminiscence of snowdrop, and daisy, and daffodil.

The two boats met in the dawn. Husband and wife gazed at each other through the shadowy light, and realised something of what the night had been to each. Marvel met the seeing eyes of Max with that quiet of fatalism which was characteristic of her in moments of crisis.

"I went out a long way—farther than I meant—but I was coming home," she said.

And the gladness died in the heart of Max; the pulse that had leapt to meet her chilled.

CHAPTER XXVI

DISTORTED VISION

THE morning brought the doctor, who made some demur at Max's masterfulness, although the doubtful moment had passed to the scientific mind; but his final visit had been robbed of its *éclat*. His patient had lived through his moment of ecstasy; he found him composed and quiet, and the beautiful young wife looking so weary that he thought woman's treacherous nerves had overtaken her at the reaction, after long strain. He took his departure cheerily, one more success added to his life of experience and knowledge, with not the vaguest idea that he left possibilities of a tempest behind him, that before sunset the man on whom his science had conferred new sight would almost curse him for the boon.

The morning hours were hours of truce. Marvel would not think. Max knew her cheerfulness was forced, but forced his own to meet it. He was at a loss, but in the depths of his consciousness knew dis-

aster had overtaken him. There was dim gratitude too, that he had not seen that awful look of fear and misery on Marvel's face at his first glance ; the vision of the tranquil night intervened between the two darknesses. He thought he knew—she did not love him. He had confused her tenderness with love, and all the while she had been paying her father's debt. The suffering which spoke in the great sad eyes, the drooping mouth, and every line of the face of his wife bereft him.

She felt his hungry gaze, but would not see. His heart was throbbing with the new passion stirred at sight of her ; he could not look away, her beauty fastened the man in him—that strange new man born last night in his fear.

The morning wore to noon. Outside, the misty sunshine and the sweet air ; inside, the man watching and the woman listening. He felt a cold prescience of age and desertion, as, leaning head on hand, his penetrating eyes upon her, he saw his wife wither and grow old ; her breath straining her bosom for freedom. He leant more forward, half held out his hand to her. But she neither saw nor heard her whispered name. For what was she listening ? He strained his own ears, and caught only the rustle of leaves and the long wash of the lake, audible through the open casement. Hark! the helter-skelter of light, hurrying footsteps along the veranda and through the lobby, and Paul's voice calling :

"Mummy, Mummy, can Farver Max see?"

Marvel sat rigidly upright and grasped the arm of her chair; the room, the voice, went far, came near again, before she heard the question:

"Can you see *me?*"

Then came a long silence, and as the mists slowly cleared, with shuddering helplessness the woman turned her eyes full of their pitiful terror on the man's face. Max was kneeling on the floor, a caressing, trembling arm round the child, whom he drew, and drew so closely that his own head was thrown back the better to scrutinise the face of Marvel's son. He had shaven himself that morning, and did not at that moment look older than his thirty years. The dark massive head, the hair of which had fallen over the scar on the temple, was held back on the handsome full throat and shoulders with the pride of an emperor, the eyes shone with a light that matched the sweetness of the mouth. Marvel's heart thrilled; in that moment she realised the tenderness of the lover under that indomitable spirit of the young explorer, and as the stern, strong face softened and lightened and glowed she caught glimpses of future possibilities that made her heart rise in passionate protest against that false beginning! Max passed his hand tenderly over the golden hair, then turned beseeching eyes upon Marvel.

"Love me," he pleaded whisperingly.

"Max!" Her answer was a cry. He did not see

her outstretched hands, his eyes were again upon the boy.

"Paul, little Paul, I seem to have seen you always. Your face has lain somewhere near my heart; I feel its charm."

The man's look was sublime. He thought he saw again the face of her he loved.

"Hair, russet gold!" He kissed it and compared it with Marvel's bronze.

"Eyes——?"

The lad in the intentness of his interest was looking so like Wynn that Marvel gasped. But she watched it. It was the scene that she had lived through many an hour.

"'Steady grey eyes set in a broad forehead under finely marked brows.' When did I say that before?" His voice took on a note of sharpness. He glanced quickly at Marvel, back to the boy, back again to his wife's grey face, caught his breath, bent with alarmed scrutiny over the perplexed child; and Marvel, fascinated, watching, saw eyelids and mouth twitch, the muscles of the man's throat stretch, the brow contract, and the broad chest heave. Hot blood surged over the bronzed face, then left it white and set. His hands were clutching the boy's shoulders. He turned an imploring, troubled glance upon Marvel. Her parched lips refused utterance. She bowed her head.

He made no sound. The drooping of the eyelids—

strained at the corners—the pressure of the upper upon the lower lip, the deep indents between the eyes, the enlarged nostrils, testified to the restraint he put upon his agony.

"Don't you like to see me, Farver Max?" queried a plaintive, tremulous treble. And Marvel remembered always that his answer was to draw the frail little body close to his breast, and kiss the upturned lips.

"God help us, Paul!" he whispered huskily.

Marvel had a terrible sense of doom. All was ended now. All the long patience was fruitless, the teasing of the years barren of fruit. Never mind, it was the end.

She passed her hand over her eyes, and roused to find herself alone with Max. He was looking down upon her with a terrible face. "O Max," she said, "I am afraid."

Thwarted passion was in his face. The stimulus of his fatherhood was checked, the delicate fibres of lover and husband snapped. The woman who had twined herself round his weakness had tricked his confidence, duped him.

"Shameless!" he muttered.

She caught his thought, that she had made his name her protection. She straightened herself and met his eyes. "I was Wynn Winter's affianced wife."

He laughed harshly. "And he——"

She interrupted with a hasty gesture. "He did *not* desert me!" She paused, shaken with conflicting

emotions, but his harshness hardened her: she knew that she meant to submit in the end, but meanwhile Max saw the Marvel of the past.

"Why did I break with him? Out of consideration —no, not of you! I make no such pretence; but out of consideration of Cordelia and Wynn, who loved each other. Who, in God's name, would have done the same by me? And whom did I mean to injure? Not you, Max Hawthorne. I was going a separate way!"

He knew it too well. It was because of it that he writhed, because she had loved the other man too absolutely to tolerate himself.

"I asked you would you take a girl out of hell," she proceeded with quiet intensity. "Let us talk fair—let us face fact. And you answered me—? What did you answer me?"

"I said I would take you!"

"Very well, but I would n't let you. It was only when I thought that you were helpless that——"

"You made your sacrifice!"

His face grew darker. Her gaze lingered on the sombre figure.

"Yes," she responded to the taunt, "I made my sacrifice. I did n't know then that I needed any man's mercy——"

He waited. She lifted her head again, and laid great emphasis on the words—"or I should n't have gone to you."

He winced.

An intensity entered into her tone that made every word tell.

"I can't tell if what I feel is what other women have felt, I know so little of other women; but it is a mistake, it seems to me, to trust oneself too near the man that holds the whip. One out of ten might not want to use it—a man like Tony, perhaps, whom women laugh at and men call a fool. But, all in all, I think it easier for a sinner to face the world than trust to the mercy of a righteous man. The world 's not respectable, you see, not as I make it out—charm it, and it is lenient—if you hurt yourself more than you hurt it. But a man whom you 've wronged"—her voice dropped to a whisper, her face grew hard almost as the face regarding her—"let the God who made him account for him—his mother can't!"

A moment of hopeless silence, then she went on from her accumulated bitterness:

"But I don't ask for mercy—I don't want it—I want love. I 've paid my debt—between the lot of you you 've taken it out of me. I 've come to the end of paying now; there 's a limit to patience, even the patience of a sinner." Her voice broke from its forced restraint. "I won't accept mercy. I 've fed my hungry heart too long on scrag-ends. I 'm too famished to make a meal off a bone. I won't try. Whatever has gone before, *I love you now*—do you

think nothing is true except the past? If you can't take my love on your knees, as you craved it, I shall not kneel for yours. Is this the end of it all, Max? The end of it? Life and love are soon over if nothing lives beyond the need of pardon."

Her voice faltered; she controlled it and looked into his burning eyes. "I am not suing. It lies with you. I ask for nothing. It is for you to ask."

He walked across the room, threw open the door, moved to the table, and lifted his hat lying there; then controlling himself rigidly, faced her with quick breath.

"I ask? Ask you for bondage? For you to yield again as you yielded before, still under the influence of another man, with his child between us to keep us apart? I am not the sort." He spoke with low, intense emphasis.

A quiver passed over Marvel's face, the defiance of her mood passed. She stepped between Max and the door. "Not the sort of man to love a woman in her need? I thought you were!"

She meant no reproach; despair and hopelessness were in her eyes and voice. Max felt little and mean—a coward. But he hardened his heart. Choking down the sob that rose above his rage his gloomy eyes met hers.

"There are times when a man can do only one of two things—kill or laugh," he said huskily. "As yet I cannot laugh. Let me go."

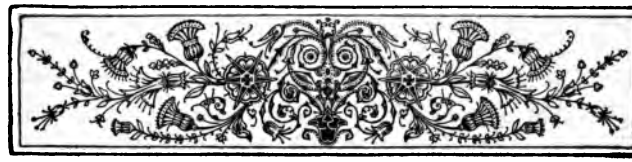
She moved from the door without another word, her head dropped upon her breast; her only enfranchisement lay in pardon, and it was withheld. She cowered before the fire chill and weak. Was this man's love? Father, lover, husband, all had robbed, despoiled, deserted. To give, to lift, to redeem, was this for women only? With desperate courage she had faced the worst, with desperate faith hoped for redemption from the past. And then recurred the vision of that young Meredith who served for his sin right to the end.

"There is no pardon!" she cried out bitterly; "heaven and earth alike demand the devil's due." This the best of love! this the best of life! She stretched out her hands appealingly in dumb agony, her unseeing eyes gazing at the red brightness of the room.

"He *did* serve, he *did* pay!" she murmured presently, going back again to her grandfather's story. "That was the half that was not told, but it was the strong half."

For an hour she sat staring vacantly into the coals. "There is only to pay—and nothing beyond," she repeated at intervals helplessly, too tired to conceive any new beginning. Max had stood for her as salvation, and Max had passed out of her life. No wealth of cultured intellect gave her precedent, the old story of shame and desertion was new to her, the universe be-

yond had no such significance as the pain that vibrated through her every nerve. She forgot that she was an heiress; not all the gold on earth could win redemption. Love only was peace.



CHAPTER XXVII

CLIMBING HIGH

MAX set his face towards the hills, more by instinct than deliberate intent ; he could not bend to this yoke without resistance, nor understand that Marvel's past had given him her present to dominate if he would. He detached what was from what had been, and flung away in jealous fury all that was his own. A madness of rage blurred the reality—that the love he had coveted from boyhood was within his grasp. In his passion he believed that he loathed what he so long had craved : all seemed foul that had been beautiful. His pulses throbbed with protest ; let him get away, away from the sight of the beautiful, sad, haunting face, beyond hand's reach of his enemy. His heart had defined this even from the first ; instinct had warned him.

He crunched through the bracken with hasty strides, not lifting his eyes to his beloved scene, drawing the labouring breath of one who fights for life. His late-born boyhood died within him. The darkness from

which he had emerged was as nothing to the black night that settled on his soul. Every faculty was baffled, every instinct thwarted.

He threw himself face downward on the grass, and shut out sight of lake and mountain; drawing back from the present, his tortured thought went to the past, and wandered through scene after scene of his lonely boyhood and youth. Marvel's figure flitted through them all; had been with him, he told himself, in those recurring hours that men called heroic, when life and limb counted nothing in the service of his fellow-man; when to gain an unexplored peak was victory not mated by its attendant toil. Love of victory—was that the mysterious secret of his daring? Had all his courage been but an impetuous dashing of himself against a commonplace life and commonplace ways? Was his very love of Marvel but another passion to subdue? to master opposing forces? He would not analyse nor submit. He would take no second place. She had passed out of his life; for the future there was left him—? He raised his haggard face and bloodshot eyes.

"——The everlasting hills," he murmured. But his spirit did not rise to meet the lofty mood of the mountains. He dragged his weary body from the ground and sought his boat.

"Not the sort of man to love a woman in her need? I thought you were!"

Marvel's face and voice arrested him. For a moment he paused, oars in hand ; then, with a muttered curse, pushed off from the shore.

Twenty-four hours ago to see the sunset had been his dearest wish. The curtain of darkness had been drawn aside, but his vision was turned inward ; the never-ending drama of mist and light for once failed in enchantment ; he saw nothing but his loss and the weary stretch of years ahead. His proud spirit had been brought low, and the sick sense of failure, the nausea of defeat, put him out of love with Nature. Till this hour her magic had never failed him, all her phenomena had compelled attention ; but in the fall of his idol, the loss of his ideal, his comprehension of all beauty seemed shattered. And, worse than all, he had failed himself ! Passion had conquered tenderness ; the poet in him was shamed at the man's vulgarness.

His face showed the contraction of his mind. He bent to his oars and did not see the little figure beckoning to him from the shore. Paul, in red serge suit, stood breast-high among the fern, like a poppy by the water's edge. Unconscious that the thought of him tormented his comrade of the past, confident of welcome and mutual interest, he called, " Take me with you, Farver Max." But the sweet, thin voice did not carry, and the boat bore on its way.

A spasm of anxiety passed over the child's face.

Father Max was going to the mountains—and he was going without him !

" Farver Max ! " he called. " You promised to take me—coo-ee ! "

But his call trailed off over the water fruitlessly, and the back of his chum struck a sort of despairing chill to the warm childish heart.

" Yes," he gasped, bobbing up and down in his agitation, " he *is* going without me."

The sweet mouth quivered, and the serious grey eyes filled so that the vanishing boat, the lake, sky, and mountains, were jumbled up together in mist. He, Paul, had never deserted Father Max when he could not see. Unpardonable—intolerable ! He choked back the tears. He *must* go—he must see the high peaks, and the snow-fields, and the white flowers. With an uplifting of the head, like Wynn's when he defied defeat, and a compression of the lips, he hastily surveyed the scene, making swift calculation. About half a mile distant there was a rugged jutting headland, past which Max must go ; to reach it over the loose stones of the beach in time to meet the boat was impossible, but there was a short cut through the bush. Father Max was close inshore, and while rounding the promontory he, Paul, would take the bee-line and be at the headland before the deserter. He darted into the bush, aromatic in autumn foliage, the great evergreens arching and linking arms, under which the eager speck of humanity

sped, unheeding the purple and gold moss carpet beneath his impatient feet, or the shadows of the dim forest cloisters—his eyes were fixed upon the opening, and the patch of water revealed red in the lurid sunset. Often he stumbled, once he rolled over for a pace or two. A frolicsome bough caught and retained his little red cap, but in this race with Fate the lad disregarded hurt and defied hindrance. His face had paled, the blue veins stood out on the delicate temples, his breath coming pantingly, and his fair hair streaming behind him. Childlike, there was no other time to him, now was the supreme moment; if he missed joy to-day it was lost. He *must* see the stars over the snow-domes: it had been promised him; and while the stern-browed man on the lake put strong oar-strokes to their division, the little lad, who knew nothing of separation and could not understand desertion, flew to reunion.

He came out upon the headland as into a transformation scene of fire from the setting sun, blinding his eyes and making his dizzy brain whirl. The mountains dipped and the waves rose up—but hurrah! on the crest of a wave came the boat. Exultant, palpitating, he stretched out appealing arms.

"Take me!" he cried, staggered, and fell into the enveloping darkness.

The sudden apparition of the lad, from the thought of whom Max fled, startled the man. The panting figure standing so perilously near the edge of the rock

put to flight all other consideration. "Stand back!" he called, as Paul tottered and fell into the deep water beneath the rocks. The splash of the small body was almost immediately followed by a louder splash; an instant later and the fair head rose above the surface. With a vigorous stroke or two Max reached the spot and had the small body within one sheltering arm, while with the other he made for the boat, gaining which he deposited his burden and scrambled in after it. The lethargy of the last few hours had fallen from him, gloom and hardness left his countenance; in the electrical moments that followed, the profoundest reality that life held to him was the white motionless face at the bottom of the boat, framed with the dripping golden hair. His tall frame was bent, the tyrannous hand swift, gentle, and deft; but when, after absorbing endless minutes, Paul gave no sign of consciousness, the grey of cheeks and dark shade under the closed eyes deepening, with a stifled cry Max with trembling hand sought for his flask, and enveloping the cold little limbs in a mackintosh, drew them to the warmth of his bared breast and forced a few drops of the spirit between the closed lips. He felt no cold himself, a fever of anxiety surged hot blood through his veins, the throbbing of his own pulses deceived him several times for the beating of the still heart. At last the heavy eyelids trembled, the grey eyes unclosed. A *moment* to take in the exquisite fact that he was held

closely in Father Max's arms, where nestling had ever meant security and content, then he smiled with ineffable sweetness.

"I catched you," he said faintly. "We 'll—climb—high!"

How long Max sat straining Marvel's dead child to his heart he did not know. The sweet little face was turned towards him with a blue bruise on the temple, and the confiding smile that still lingered on the pale lips attested to the terms of *camaraderie*, the intimacy that had been between them. The irony and bitterness of the lad's glad words were mingling with a poignant sense of loss. Caught him? Ah, yes, he was basely deserting! Climb high? God, how could he go home and tell the child's mother? Fate had derided his effort to escape, forced him to an ugly task.

He looked round wildly as for deliverance, and became conscious of the rugged landscape illuminated by the purple light of evening, lights varying with the vapours that enveloped the distant objects; he heard once more the soft murmur of cascade and the call of nesting bird—awoke, as it were, from a dream, fiend-peopled, to find his boat drifting nearer and nearer to that ruddy window gleaming across the quiet, darkening water.

For the first time he was freed from the exacting in-

dividuality that had marred his love; remorse, pity, rose above self-seeking. How go in and take Marvel her child?

He staggered into the firelit room like one whose burden was too heavy, his sodden clothes clinging to his magnificent frame, his broad chest and sinewy arms as he had bared them for the plunge, Paul closely folded to him. What he had meant to say—the tenderest that gathered and shaped itself in the scattered rays of his new consciousness—was arrested on his tongue. Marvel, with dishevelled hair and staring eyes, sat looking into the burning logs, talking incoherently. She turned her head as Max entered, but did not appear to recognise him.

"Now mark," she said, holding up her finger as though to impress her meaning, "Mary Meredith was dying—our common mother—to go for Max was the only way to appease her——"

A deadly chill fell upon the man's heart. Was Marvel mad? His experience of illness was limited, and so long as he could remember Marvel had never been ill. In petrified silence he stood rooted to the spot. In the secret recesses of his mind he blamed himself for this, and the blame scorched him. He groped his way to the rough couch, and gently laid down his burden; then, with the agony of doubt still overmastering him, crying in his heart for mercy, he *sank* down at his wife's feet, encircling her with his

arm. She paid no heed to his caress, to his self-abasement ; but with a dry, hard voice said, " Paul is dead ; drowned in Manapouri. I saw him fall."

In the intolerable moment that followed, the rising autumn wind could be heard outside, and the splash of oars and grating of a boat against the steps. Marvel rose, her great eyes shining in the firelight, and, as though she saw through the walls, went quietly to the door and opened it, repeating mechanically, " Paul is dead ; drowned in Manapouri."

A word of protest, quick steps, and Wynn was in the room. Whatever his errand, it was forgotten now.

" Why—what ? " he ejaculated hastily ; then the firelight revealing the swathed figure ; without glance or word for Max he slipped to his knees beside the couch and removed the covering. For a moment his breath failed him, his head sank into his hands. When he lifted his head again, Max, watching, saw the delicate nostrils quivering—saw, too, the grey hair and the lines seven years had drawn upon his rival's face. In his double blindness he had pictured him ever the gay and *débonnaire* man he had last looked upon.

" ' Sir, I am Paul,' " murmured Wynn in bitterest memory, oblivious of criticism, heedless of decorum. Looking up, the eyes of the two men met over the body of Marvel's son. No word was spoken ; anger, recrimination, reconciliation, were alike useless. But Max knew that while Wynn lived, through any eager-

ness of genius, any pomp or glory of fame, the little still face of Paul would smile to humble and to hurt.

Marvel bent down and touched Wynn gently, then let her hand stray to the wet hair.

"Quite dead," she said softly—"quite, quite dead!" then, with a sudden change of voice and manner, as though realisation had smote her—"To the uttermost farthing!" she cried; "to the uttermost farthing!" Then to neither of the two men who sprang to her did she cry, but to the woman—"Cordelia!"

The soft snow was coming "down and down," as little Paul would have said, obliterating the new-made grave on the hill beside "the lake of the sorrowing heart," blotting out the forest, shrouding the great mountains, and in all that vast silent world only the little cottage on the beach showed gleam of light or sign of life; and here was enacting one of the last scenes in a girl's life of that old drama of human passion which is the world's leveller.

Wynn Winter paced noiselessly but swiftly up and down the cottage veranda. As he crossed the light thrown from an open window the mackintosh cloak and broad-brimmed hat that he wore were revealed white with snow; but he felt neither cold nor fatigue, he was consumed by a fire of torturing suspense. A few hours would leave him self-condemned for ever, or set him free in humblest gratitude to build from new

conception of life. If Marvel slept that night she would live, had been the verdict; and hour after hour she babbled incessantly, the very vitality that had served her so long exhausting in her extremity.

Wynn paused for the hundredth time before the window—wide open to admit the air—and gazed on the scene within, that was so like that scene when the white-robed Quakeress first took pre-eminence in his heart. She was little changed, except that the exquisite face, turned to the fever-flushed face upon the pillows, wore a look of deeper meaning, wider knowledge; the star-like eyes were not so far-gazing, but in their tender, shortened vision showed consciousness of mortal frailty, and compassion for mortal pain.

Wynn's heart expanded as he beheld her; though he lost her irrevocably, she had been the influx of new life to him. He knew without her telling, that in her inexorable sense of justice she would deem it monstrous to take happiness were Marvel denied; her wedded love would be her free gift, or it would never be his: she would drive him back to loneliness, teach him how to live it to maintain the struggle, waste her youth and beauty in endurance, but demand from him "a life for a life." Fate had so ordained it that the supreme experience of Marvel's life was the supreme experience of three other lives. He had been ready enough to take, Wynn told himself, willing to stake all for fame's

sake—but success? If he might not hope and love, be free to live again, was it success? If only he could gather all dire consequence to himself his forfeiture of happiness had been a just price.

Cordelia met his eyes for a moment with a lingering soft look, as though, while he leaned there against the window, she had followed his battle, step by step. A faint flush tinted her cheeks, her eyes suddenly filled, but in the next instant her steady gaze was on Marvel's face again; she lifted a cool soft hand to shade the wide, dark, brilliant eyes that wandered from face to face without recognition, short muttered sentences falling into the stillness of the room.

Max, as though unable to meet the unseeing glances of the shining eyes, stood with his head buried on his arms leaning on the foot-rail of the bed, absorbed in his own thoughts. In an occasional silence he looked up breathlessly, but would not seem to listen to that "untold half" which fell in broken bits into his sore heart, instructing him of another soul's suffering, convicting of stupidity and density, pleading for consolation, and deliverance, and warm human love.

Another glance at Max and with compressed lips Wynn walked again to the veranda's edge.

"Hark!" cried Marvel's voice in the peculiar strained tone of delirium. "Do you hear the falling water? Mount Baloon is all in darkness! Snow! *I 've lost* the way and missed Max."

"Nay, sister," came Cordelia's soothing accents, "thy way is not lost, and thou hast found Max."

A moment's silence, then again the restless tossing and muttered words which rose to defiance: "A man's works live after him. . . . I *will* paint my picture. . . . But what 's to become of me? . . . don't I count in anywhere? . . . I am your debtor. . . . Wynn loves Cordelia Grey . . . there is a place I can make for myself. . . . We make environments, Miss Grey . . . life gets blocked . . . the living soul can't stagnate. . . . I love you now, Max. *Remember not past years.*"

To each brain there another picture rose of this same room, this same song. The fair head with its crown of golden braids was lifted; once before Cordelia's gift of song had conquered. A thrill of expectation and hope seemed to rouse both men. Could she meet the unspoken demand, would the soul-stirring strain be the lullaby to that tired spirit fighting its lonely way through pitiless darkness?

Cordelia's lips parted, and the rich voice, low and tremulous, fell like cooling balm on the smarting hearts; her own spirit overcame its doubt and she triumphed over human conflict.

"I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on.

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: *remember not* past years."

As the supplication ended a long-drawn breath made music to the listeners; the sad dark eyes were softly closed—Marvel was fast asleep.

Tip-toe Max crept to the veranda, the two men wrung hands, and stood together in silence, looking out into the snow.

CONCLUSION

TWO LETTERS

"LONDON.

"WOMAN whom I love, I break the silence of three years because my heart hungereth for news of thee. A year ago my grey-haired child was put to sleep (no other hath taken his place), and since then, till yesterday, my husband and I have travelled.

"To-day is the last of the year, and the snow lying deep bringeth memory of the past.

"My news, dear heart, is soon told to thee.

"Wynn dreameth of another picture. He has not spoken of it until now, for he was busy deluding my father with the idea that his hour of inspiration had come. He left earth happy in the delusion; not the only child to whom illusion hath been contentment!

"I fear words lest they fall harshly on thine ear, but if from the fulness of my life I can serve thee, use me, for thyself or thy work, for rumour hath reached us of thy doings. I, who have no claims of motherhood,

would fain, from my full life and leisure, give somewhat to the common need.

"Dear, may we not meet? May I not see thy little daughter? And tell me of thy giant. We were entertained in Switzerland by stories of his daring, to which Wynn added others, proud to call him friend. Nay, I cannot say what I would! The individual soul alone realiseth its own good. I mine! thou thine!

"Thy sister in love,

"CORDELIA."

"DEVON.

"CORDELIA DEAR,—

"My little Alice has my mother's face, and Max worships her. I don't think she 'll be clever in any way at all—only sweet. This is her birthday, and every child in the village is to be made happy to-day. Max has organised a great feast. He has the history of each child and their accumulated desires at his heart. Tony was right! Cordelia, how did Tony get to know him? He has done all and more than even he believed. The people respect him, the children love him. They watch his comings and goings, and trot in groups after him along the streets. He rules his kingdom; but at home he is ruled.

"About what you call my 'doings'; will you help? I 'll tell you. Charles Marvel, my mother's father, at his death bequeathed me what should have been my

mother's. It is not possible that I could benefit by that which should have succoured her. But I think if she knew she would be pleased that in her name help was given to homeless girls in the great City. And so, Cordelia, if you will, where shall we meet to talk of this?

"Your loving

"MARVEL."

THE END

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